



**Acts 19:21-20:16**  
**A Riot And A Resuscitation**

Summary: Do you defend your god, or does God defend you?

There are many good things about going verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter through whole books of the Bible. For example:

- It keeps you focused.
- It gives you a greater familiarity with Scripture as we all begin to understand what this Book is saying.
- It allows Scripture to set the agenda in the church instead of the pastor's latest great idea or the 24 hour news cycle, which is especially important when you deal with hard subjects – everyone knows why the pastor is talking about this issue right now: it just came up in the text and we can all see it.

But there are some drawbacks too, let me take a minute and deal with two of them. First, and I know this has been an issue for some people – it means you don't always address what's going on in the world. And this is me, personally, I can tell you I always lean more toward ignoring current events and getting straight into Scripture. Again, that can be good – it keeps you focused on timeless truth in this ever-changing world, and some people come into church fed up with current events, they want a moment of escape.

But other people show up at church and they're hoping the pastor will say something about the thing that is weighing on them, because they're hurting, or angry, or they have questions and they hope the pastor knows and cares too and that he'll say something.

Of course the challenge is you have both of those people – the one who hopes they won't hear anything and the one who hopes they hear something, sitting side by side.

And again, my personal preference is to ignore headlines and stay in the Scripture. I've taught on the woman caught in adultery on Mother's Day. I wasn't trying to make a point, or be controversial; it's just where we were in the text. So, that will, no doubt, please some of you, but it will frustrate some of you too and for that, I am sorry. I am working on it. I am working on trying to figure out how to the best possible pastor I can, the pastor God wants me to be, and the pastor you need me to be.

So please, pray for me. Pray that I would know when to speak up and when to press on, and pray, most of all, that when I speak I would say the things God wants to be said. There's no shortage of opinions in this world, no one needs mine, but if, with His help and your

prayers, I can say anything for God, well, that's something we all need to hear.

So, that's one problem with just going straight through verse-by-verse, but here's another, and it's one we've hit this morning: sometimes it's hard to divide up the text into focused sermons.

Here's my challenge: a riot unfolds in Ephesus at the end of Acts Chapter 19 and that could be a whole sermon. But then, in the beginning of Chapter 20 there's a little description of Paul's travels which doesn't really make for a good sermon by itself. But then you get to the part where Paul is speaking to some church leaders and that could be a whole sermon, or two on its own. And it will be.

So, the question is, do I tack the beginning of Chapter 20 onto the riot from Chapter 19 or wait and open up with it next time before getting into the message to the leaders? It doesn't really fit well with either.

But, for reasons that will become clear when we get there, I thought it would be best to go ahead and add it on this morning and hope that the heat and the length of the sermon doesn't put any of you to sleep.

Before we get there though, we'll look at a riot that broke out over a collision between religion and economics, and we'll spend some time considering what it's like to worship a god you have to defend instead of a God that loves, leads, and provides for you.

We pick up where we left off last week:

**Acts 19:21** When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

So, Paul wants to go over to Greece, then down to Jerusalem, and he hopes to visit Rome after that – we'll get more details later. But for now he sends some of the crew ahead to prepare while he stays in Asia at Ephesus.

Now, I need to explain some things to you about Ephesus. You need to know it was a big city, with a population of around a half-million people. It was part of the Roman province of Asia, the region we call the country of Turkey today. It was a wealthy city – a place where you could find a collection of books worth over 50,000 pieces of silver, which we saw burned last week by a group of pagan priests who had become Christians.

You also need to know Ephesus was home to the Temple of Artemis (her Greek name) or Dianna (her Roman name) and the temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People traveled from all over the Empire to visit.

Think of a city like Orlando, Florida and ask yourself – how much of the local economy is affected by the theme parks? If Disneyworld shuts down, what affect does that have on the city?

Well, as we're going to see, people in Ephesus were starting to wonder the same thing about their temple: if it shuts down, or if people stop coming, what affect will that have on the rest of us? Read with me as we note what happens when you mix economics with religion:

23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

This is another name for Christians. Jesus said, (John 14:6) "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father, except through Me." So those who followed Him were said to follow the Way and apparently, they were making a difference for Jesus in Ephesus.

24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 26 Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27 So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

Artemis, or Diana, was worshipped as the mother of life who nourished all creation. She was thought to be the most popular of all the Greek and Roman gods at the time. A total of 33 temples, scattered across the Empire, were dedicated to her but this was the most important and prestigious of them all.

Construction began around the year 600 BC and went through several phases lasting 250 years. By way of comparison, America just celebrated it's 244th birthday. The completed temple stood for over 500 years until it was destroyed in 262 AD during an invasion by the Goths.

It was re-discovered and excavated by archeologists around 100 years ago. It covered nearly 100,000 square feet. That's roughly two football fields and the roof was supported by over one hundred columns that were sixty feet tall and six feet in diameter – that's around a five-story building.

Inside the temple was a statue historians think was carved from a meteorite, which, so the story goes, "fell from the heavens" sent by Zeus.

Archeologists have uncovered silver statues of the goddess, coins that bear her image, and miniature replicas of the temple made of terracotta and marble. It seems people came to the temple for worship, bought these items from people like Demetrius, and then left them

as an offering to the god.

And that happened *a lot*. So many people visited the temple, and so many offerings were brought, the temple opened its own bank accepting deposits, offering loans, and becoming the leading financial institution in all of Asia.<sup>1</sup>

But, of course, whenever money starts to pile up, problems are never far away – scholars have also found historical records of financial mismanagement: temple money was funneled to private parties sparking an investigation by the proconsul – which will become important for you to know in just a minute.

I tell you all of this so you can understand the background when you hear Demetrius complain that their lucrative religious industry is being threatened. He and the other craftsmen feel they must rally to defend their god or risk losing their way of life. He was afraid that their great god might “*be despised and her magnificence destroyed*” and that he would lose his business in the process.

So let’s talk about that for a minute – let’s talk about the disruptive power of the Christian faith. Let’s recognize what Demetrius saw – Jesus was changing people in Ephesus, transforming lives, and that was noticeable publicly. People didn’t do the things they used to do, didn’t say the things they used to say, didn’t worship the same way, didn’t spend their time and money the same way. And Demetrius sees this as a threat.

He’s concerned about Diana’s reputation, yes, but he’s really concerned about losing his job. The temple is important and all, but at the end of the day, I kind of like my way of life and I don’t want to lose it, so I’m willing to fight for it.

But let me ask: does that have to happen? Is there another option here?

What if, instead of resisting Paul’s message, he listens and Demetrius becomes persuaded too? What if Paul persuades him to serve the God who made him instead of making trinkets for Diana? To use his hands to serve the God whose hands were pierced for him?

Does he have to lose his job? Probably not. He just needs to shift his focus and approach and use his talent in other ways. Do you think God loves silversmiths? Do you think God loves craftsmen and artists? Absolutely. So, do you think you could be a craftsman, a carpenter, a stonemason, or a painter, a sculptor, a film maker or photographer today, and worship Jesus with those gifts? Absolutely.

There are very, very few jobs that you couldn’t hold and be a Christian. God wants to make a difference in your life, God wants to turn the world upside down through you. He wants to fix things that are broken through you, in ways big and small. He wants you to represent the Way at work, in the lab, and in the community, in the concert hall, the studio, and the theater. The Bible calls this being salt and light, being an ambassador for Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Polhill, 409, also Pfeiffer and Vos, see “Ephesus.”

But listen, when I say that, I'm telling you about an opportunity that I hope is compelling and exciting. I'm encouraging you to see that there is eternal significance in the work you do, the way you do it, and absolutely, positively in the people you do it with. Jesus might not sign your paycheck with His own hand, but that doesn't mean He's not with you on the job. He is building a kingdom and He cares about people – so He's giving you the chance to make a difference by working for Him, wherever you work and whatever you do.

And He wants you to do it in a way that is attractive and compelling so that people want to be around you, people want to join in with you, people want to work for you and with you or have you working for them.

Demetrius doesn't need to worry about losing his livelihood due to Jesus, he needs to surrender to Jesus and figure out how to represent and serve Jesus through his life, his calling and career.

Demetrius needs to figure out the same thing we all need to figure out today: how can I love God and love others through my job and at my job? And friends, in a world as dark and depressing as ours can be at times, we really, really, need to be thinking about that. How can I make a difference by letting God work through me at work?

But Demetrius is afraid of what he might lose as God changes the lives of people around him, so instead of surrendering to Jesus and the message of God's love, he becomes angry and spreads that anger to others.

28 Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

29 So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord

Now, this theater was more like an outdoor stadium, it held 25,000 people. To give you a size comparison, Eagle Bank arena at GMU seats 10k, the Verizon center and Audi field hold 20k, Nationals Stadium holds 41k. So, this is a lot of people and they

(29 cont.) ... seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.

These men were perhaps students of Paul, grabbed by the mob. They're innocent of any wrongdoing, except guilt by association. So Paul wants to go in and sort things out.

30 And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him.

31 Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.

Paul's friends tell him wait for a better time - it's hard to listen when emotions run high.

32 Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was

confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.

It's likely that Alexander wants to disassociate the Jews from Paul and the Christian message, to say, "Hey guys, don't get mad at us, don't lump us in with them." But, again, most people participating in a mob or riot aren't thinking straight. They're not listening to finer points and subtle distinctions. So:

34 But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Basically, they just got louder and more energized – our god is great, can't you tell!?!

When you create your own god, like Demetrius, you also often have to supply its power. You create your own system of worship and if you don't get what you want, you assume you need to try harder. So you make a bigger sacrifice, and you chant louder.

Even Christians sometimes fall into this trap – we think that if we fast, or if we pray long enough, or if we read enough of our Bible or if we do our devotions every morning, then God will be really pleased with us and He will finally give us what we want. But remember, **we don't worship God in order to get what we want; we worship Him because He is worthy** and that is what we were designed to do. He is unfolding His plan, we pray His kingdom come, His will be done.

God doesn't need our zeal to make things happen. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on the day of the triumphal entry, the people shouted out Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest, and the chief priests told Him to keep His people quiet, but He told them that if the people were quiet, the very rocks would cry out.

What's the point? God will be praised and glorified no matter the source. He doesn't require us to shout and cry out in order to protect His name. But back in Ephesus, they're all worked up over the need to save their god.

Finally the mayor shows up and he's able to get everyone calmed down. He's called the town clerk, but he's the link between the locals and the Empire and he knows what they stand to lose if the Empire is unhappy.

35 And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? 36 Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. 37 For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.

They're not **robbers of temples** – do you remember what I said earlier? That was a real

thing. There had been some issues recently with temple officials re-routing and embezzling funds. Paul wasn't doing that. And, he wasn't, apparently, directly attacking Diana either. He was preaching Jesus.

38 Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. 39 But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. 40 For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." 41 And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

You need to know that Rome would take away the freedom of cities and regions that could not govern themselves and maintain order. The clerk warns everybody – hey, we've got a pretty good thing going here with the status quo – don't ruin it. And people listen. They go home.

Which is fascinating, because it exposes something - apparently, the real seat of power in Ephesus was not found in the temple of Artemis, it was in the court of the Roman governor. Forget pleasing Diana with your worship and sacrifices, what we really need to do is please the Empire or they're going to make our lives miserable. Diana was great, but not as great as Caesar.

And yet, neither Diana nor Rome could stop the Goths from invading in the third century. They sacked her temple and the religion died shortly thereafter. Do you know, or have you heard of, anyone who says "[Great is Diana of the Ephesians](#)" today? Of course not.

Meanwhile, according to [Romans 13:1](#) "[there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.](#)" God the Father is not subject to the governments of this world, He reigns over them and while we certainly need to obey the laws of the land, we also recognize that our allegiance is primarily to the God who transcends them.

Think about this: Christianity has a long history of persecution at the hands of governments that were ruled by wicked men, but that persecution has never quenched our faith – the Church has outlived countless empires, dynasties, and parties. It has, and it will, because our King is eternal, and He was not made with human hands. He made us.

And so, we find in Ephesus a summary of the pattern we have seen throughout the book of Acts: there was opposition, danger, even persecution from outsiders but the Kingdom of God continued to advance.

Now we get to that awkward transitional part:

[Acts 20:1](#) After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia. 2 Now when he had gone over that region



and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece 3 and stayed three months.

He spent that time in Corinth, and most scholars say this is when he wrote the book of Romans, looking forward to visiting the city when he left Jerusalem:

(Acts 20:3 cont.) And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. 5 These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.

The men represented churches that Paul had planted. They had taken up offerings for the churches back in Israel and were coming along to deliver the funds and show unity with and support for brothers and sisters in Christ.

6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. 7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

Paul has never been to Troas and knows he'll be leaving soon, so he tries to make the most of the visit. But, it's been a long day at work for many people, the night is wearing on, it's warm from all the bodies and lamps are burning which reduces the oxygen in the room and also lulls you to sleep – it's a bad combination for anyone fighting the sleep monster.

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. 9 And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus (The Greek word used here indicates the boy was somewhere between 8 and 14 years old), who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. 10 But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." 11 Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. 12 And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

So there's a little crisis, but they deal with the issue, have a midnight snack and get back into the Bible Study. Paul pulls an all-nighter before taking off again.

Personally, I've never been bothered by people falling asleep in church, especially if they're legitimately tired. I used to lead a home group and a guy named Joe would come. He was a construction worker, got up early every morning drove a long way to the jobsite, worked all day in the sun, then battled traffic all the way back in order to make it to home group where no matter how hard he tried, he almost always, started to nod off.



But you know what? No one looked down on him, because, *he came*. He tried. He wanted to be there and he wanted to stay awake, he just wasn't always able.

The truth is, the fact that he came spoke volumes to the rest of us. It challenged us to ask – would we do the same thing, or we would just go home and go to bed?

Now, there is a time for that, but there's also a time to feel convicted by someone like Joe who made such efforts to be there. It makes you ask why is this so important to them and to ask whether it's really that important to you, and if not, what do they know that you don't?

You see, the real danger is not for those who fall asleep physically, it's for those who are asleep spiritually. That might be because you've never woken up – you're still dead in your sins, you haven't been born again, so all this is strange and confusing to you, you're dull because you haven't opened your heart.

Or, it might be because you're born-again, but you're so busy with other things that you find it hard to make time for church or stay focused on spiritual things. You think spiritual things are optional, not essential; incidental, instead of instrumental. And so, you're giving the best parts of your day and your energy to other things.

Or maybe you're falling asleep spiritually because you're bored – things don't hold your interest. You're ambivalent. Meh.

Friends, do you know loss of physical appetite is a warning sign? Healthy people don't lose their appetite. Either you've satisfied your appetite or something is wrong.

If you're bored spiritually, if you find it hard to be engaged or excited with things that once held your attention, things that once moved your soul, is it possible that you're just not hungry because you're satisfying yourself with something other than God? Or is it possible that you're sick?

It could be that you're just around some bad preaching. I hope not. If so, pray for that man, pray for me. I would rather have you go to another church, if they love Jesus and the Bible, than sit here and fall asleep and be bored – but pray for me on your way out.

Pray that I, or whoever else you're bored by, would be able to do a better job presenting the life changing truth of the gospel, presenting the glory of Christ, repeating a message that threatened to tear down the entire system of worship and work in Ephesus – a message that outlasted the Temple of Diana, the Empire of Rome, and the Goths who came next – a message that people are willing to stay up late for, travel long distances for, and ultimately, if necessary, suffer for. Pray that we all would be moved and stirred, attracted to and held by the truth of this book.

Well, we don't want to create another Eutychus, but let me just press on through these last three verses so we're well positioned for the next time we jump back into Acts and then we'll wrap up with prayer. Luke gives us the travel itinerary as Paul heads to Jerusalem:

13 Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. 14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. 15 We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus. 16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

Let's pray.