

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 8TH-9TH // BOOK OF ACTS

BAD FOR BUSINESS (ACTS 19:21-27) RESOLVED BY THE SPIRIT (VS. 21-22)

Paul has been in Ephesus for two years, preaching, teaching, and doing very fruitful ministry.

- After a while, Paul “resolved by the Spirit (or *“in his spirit”*) to go to Macedonia, Achaia, Jerusalem, and eventually Rome.
- “Spirit” may refer to either Paul’s conviction or the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

WHOSE SPIRIT GUIDED?

It could’ve been Paul’s own spirit/conviction or the Holy Spirit guiding him.

- But maybe it was both. God’s guidance often involves both human responsibility (Paul thinks, plans, and makes decisions based on his own convictions) AND divine direction (Paul recognizes that God was ultimately leading his steps).

DIVINE NECESSITY

The language used indicates that Paul understood his journey to Rome as part of God’s larger plan.

- Paul’s journey to Rome parallels Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem in Luke’s Gospel: Paul’s mission was not just about his own preferences; he had a sense that this was divine necessity.
- God often guides us through Spirit-shaped desires: our job is to surrender those to the Lord.

Around that time, there arose a disturbance from the people of Ephesus concerning “the Way,” or the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- The disturbance centered on the issue of economics and regional identity.
- Each year, thousands of pilgrims and tourists would come to Ephesus to visit the temple of Artemis, and dealers in religious trinkets/idols would cash in on their worship.

ARTEMIS OF THE EPHESIANS

Artemis of Ephesus (Diana) was less like the Artemis of Greek mythology and more like a Near Eastern mother-goddess of fertility.

- The temple of Artemis in Ephesus was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, and it was the largest building in the Greek world (425 feet by 225 feet with 60-foot pillars; much bigger than a football field).

Within this temple was a 20-foot square altar with a 13-foot-tall image of Artemis.

- The cult of Artemis was one of the most widely followed in the Greco-Roman world.
- A weeklong festival to her, known as the Artemision, took place in the spring and was a time of debauchery, pagan worship, carousing, and good business for the city of Ephesus.

But now, in Ephesus, there was a new teaching going around, claiming manmade gods were not gods at all (v. 26).

- If increasing numbers of people in Ephesus kept buying into this message, the silversmiths who made a living making and selling these idols would be out of business.
 - Since their livelihood depended on the popularity of Artemis, Christianity was a problem.
- The hatred and contempt this group had towards Christianity had little to do with whether their claims were true—it was that they interfered with a certain lifestyle.
- Many of the Ephesians had grown so comfortable and so in love with the lifestyle that the worship of Artemis provided them that ANYTHING which required change or repentance was hated.

“A MAJOR DISTURBANCE ABOUT THE WAY”

The way of Jesus will certainly interfere with, interrupt, and disturb your lifestyle.

- The first question we ask of the Christian faith should not be, “What do I have to give up or change to be a faithful Christian?”
- It should be, “Is Jesus really God and is the Kingdom of Heaven really as good as He said it was?” (Matthew 13:44-46).

FILLED WITH RAGE (ACTS 19:28-34)

After Demetrius stirred up this group of silversmiths and others who profited financially from worship of Artemis, the response was typical and not surprising for anyone who understands human nature.

- The group became “filled with rage” and was caught up in mass hysteria.
- Their outrage began over lost profits, but it shifted into patriotism (v. 28).

This growing crowd rushed into the open-air amphitheater in Ephesus (with a capacity of 25,000), grabbing two of Paul’s travel companions—Gaius and Aristarchus.

- Paul tried to address the screaming mob, but the Believers restrained him (v. 30).
- Even the officials of the province who were friends of Paul begged him not to go in for fear he would be hurt or killed (v. 31).

Luke makes a fascinating insight about the mob in verse 32: “most of them did not know why they had come together.”

- Those who are the angriest and talk the loudest often know the least.
- To become “outraged” without truly understanding an issue or seeking to resolve it rationally points to ignorance and maybe even pre-existing hatred.

In the midst of this chaos, the Jews pushed a Jewish leader named Alexander to the front.

- Perhaps he was intended to explain that all the fuss wasn’t caused by the Jews and that Paul and the Christians were the real culprits.
- But when the Ephesians realized he was Jewish, and the Jews didn’t worship Artemis, they chanted for about two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

MASS HYSTERIA

Most historians believe the cult of Artemis was so widespread and financially profitable that any lost business to silversmiths in Ephesus would have been minimal.

- Demetrius took something that ultimately wasn’t really a big deal and incited a riot.
- In our media-saturated society, we live almost every day on the brink of mass hysteria.
- “*Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions*” (Proverbs 18:2, NIV).

CHRISTIANS AND MASS HYSTERIA

“Does this involve me?”

- “Am I seeking to understand an issue or only to express my opinion?”
- “Are the Scriptures clear on this issue?”
- “How would Jesus respond?”
- “Is this worth losing a relationship over?”
- “How is Jesus glorified in my response to this situation/issue?”

ORDER IN EPHEBUS (ACTS 19:35-41)

Amid the mass hysteria, an unlikely and anonymous hero appears—the city clerk.

- A “city clerk” would have been either a record keeper or a mayor-like figure.
- Either way, he was the voice of reason in this scene, and he recognized the Ephesians could be in serious trouble with Rome if they didn’t stop their rioting.

The Ephesians believed their city was chosen as a site of worship to Artemis because of a stone that fell from Heaven (a meteor) on the site of the temple.

- Since this fact was “undeniable” (v. 36), the Christian preachers weren’t really a threat to the cult of Artemis, and the rioting needed to stop.

- If they really had something against the Christians, they could bring them to court and sue them.

Nothing the city clerk said was a defense of Christianity in any form.

- Still, his actions were admirable as he sought to restore order and settle the mob before it got completely out of control.
- So, why is this account of the riot in Ephesus in our Bibles? Why did the Holy Spirit lead Luke to record this episode in the narrative of the book of Acts?

The first reason is that this account shows us the first Christians broke no civil laws of the Roman Empire.

- Their worship of Jesus was at times unpopular, and it earned them intense persecution, but they always respected their governing leaders and lived under authority.

- They were people of great respect, civility, and love—even when they were misunderstood.

The second reason is to show that when the gospel and God’s truth are presented clearly and lived out in the lives of Christians, it will ALWAYS produce friction between the systems/kingdoms of this world.

- If you want everybody to always like you, don’t follow Christ—go sell ice cream.
- You might be misunderstood, misjudged, mislabeled, and resented for following Christ.

The third reason this account might be included in our Bibles is to remind us that even the most popular beliefs that aren’t grounded in the truth of Jesus will someday fade away.

- No matter how it may seem in a moment, Jesus’ Kingdom will come and He will reign.
- The city clerk ironically suggested that the Christian God was of no threat to the “great Artemis” of Ephesus.

“St. Paul prayed publicly in Artemis’ temple itself, exorcising its demons. ‘Of a sudden the altar of Artemis split in many pieces...and half the temple fell down,’ instantly converting the Ephesians, who wept, prayed, or took flight. Over the course of the fourth century, the majority of Ephesians did convert to Christianity. The pagan temples were declared closed by Theodosius I in 391.”

- “In 401, the temple was finally destroyed by Christians inspired by ‘golden-tongued’ Saint John Chrysostom, who had recently come to Ephesus as its archbishop. Its marble stones were used in the construction of other buildings, and some of the columns in Hagia Sophia (a church) originally belonged to the temple of Artemis” (New World Encyclopedia, “Temple of Artemis”).

A HOLY DISTURBANCE (VS. 21-27)

- Jesus doesn’t play nice with our idols—there can only be one God in your life (Matthew 6:24).
- What things do we feel the need to defend or consult first before saying yes to Jesus?
- God’s disturbance of our lifestyle isn’t because He wants to wreck our good time—He might tear down what we have to give us more than we can ever ask, think, or imagine.

HOLINESS AMIDST OUTRAGE (VS. 28-34)

- One might argue that being an informed and concerned citizen is a matter of civic responsibility, but constant anger, vitriol, and outrage over controversies outside our control is unholiness, sin, and a foothold for Satan.
- “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness” (James 1:19-20).

KINGDOM OVER CULTURE (VS. 35-41)

- Today’s trends are tomorrow’s punchlines. Someday, all the kingdoms, governments, and religions of this world will crumble.
- Only one King and Kingdom will remain, so don’t get too attached to this world.
- Will you honor your King even if no one else does? Or are you bowing a knee to what our culture worships?