

# Acts

*“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

## **Ministry That Turns A City Upside Down Part II**

**February 4, 2024**

**Acts 19:21-41**

**Gerhard Peysar**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! We continue in Acts with apostle Paul today in the City of Ephesus. Levi remarked that Paul spent 2-3 years in that city, and Luke only recorded three events. Our job is to figure out why these events of all the happenings of three year of ministry are highlighted by Luke. Last week we heard of how Ministry that turns a city upside down. Do you remember our take home points? Such Ministry, ministry that turns a city upside down is: 1) Animated by God’s power 2) Saturated with the Word of God 3) Invokes the fear of the Lord 4) marked by real repentance. One of the things that struck me from last week’s message was a comment Levi made regarding Ministry Animated by God’s power. He said, we need to [filled with God’s power] “aim for the stars, aim for what we were called to aim for, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have taught you, and lo, I AM with you until the end of the age”. That’s our call isn’t it. That’s our aim. To make disciples. It seems so simple, and yet making disciples can transform cities. That’s what we saw last week.

And this week we see that transformation continue. Authentic disciples of Christ, living differently, living “THE WAY”, as salt and light is REVOLUTIONARY. And by their WITNESS they turn places upside down and, in today’s text, cause a Riot.

So our approach to our text today is simply to try and discover why things came to a head in Ephesus and the CITY started to RIOT. And then we will hopefully draw out some implications for life today.

So with that in mind let’s read the Word of the Lord:

Now after these events 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." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

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

When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So 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. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, 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. Now 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. Some 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. But 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!"

And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, 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? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If 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. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:21-41

The Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

We have said before the Gospel shakes up culture. It reorders everything because at its foundations it is different. It calls into question the fundamental assumptions, and allegiances of every culture it comes into contact with. It did so back in Paul's day, and continues to today. And this is not always a quiet process. So with that in mind, let's ask:

### **Why did the Gospel cause a Riot in Ephesus?**

#### **1) The Economy of Sin was Threatened**

This is really clearly articulated in the text. Read with me:

“Men, you know that *from this business we have our wealth*. 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”. Acts 19:25b-26

You see, the Gospel hit the idol industry where it hurts – their wallets.” This is often the point of conflict between the world and the Christian. It is because how we use our money is so central to what we love.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21.

Jesus talks a plenty about money! Some 15% of his teachings recorded in the Gospels are related to money and possessions.<sup>1</sup> Eleven out of 39 parables are about money and possessions<sup>2</sup>, and one out of every 7 verses in Luke is about money! How we spend our Money is the straight arrow pointing towards *what we love and what we desire*. Jesus says:

“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Luke 16:13

It should then come as no surprise that as more men and women became disciples of Jesus in Ephesus, the economy of the sin, the economy of Darkness, started to suffer. We saw a similar conflict in Acts 16:19 when the slave owners lost income after Paul and Silas exorcized the prophetic demon out of her.

Matthew Henry helpfully makes the point:

“Men are jealous for that by which they get their *wealth*; and many *set themselves* against the gospel of Christ, because it calls men from all unlawful crafts, however much wealth is to be gotten by them.”<sup>3</sup>

“Unlawful crafts” Ephesus was full of them – we heard of some last week, magic, witch-craft etc. And so is our world. Did you know you can buy so called “sin stocks” – Vice ETFs and Mutual Funds specifically invested in Sin Industries like gambling, smoking, cannabis, porn, etc!?! Anyone else thing that is crazy?!

**Commented [GPI]:** Just so you know teens, Video game shares are held in by these Vice ETFs!

The world loves its money. So, it ought to be threatened by way the Gospel reorders the way we spend money. I love how Kevin DeYoung asks the logical application question in response to this observation:

“Is your life a threat to sinful practices and those living by them?” - Kevin DeYoung<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/a-new-beginning/read/articles/money-and-motives-9220.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/bible-verses-about-money-21-helpful-scriptures/>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible. Accessed through Olive Tree Bible Software. Jan, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin DeYoung. An illustrated guide to the book of acts....

That is a really good question. Have you ever asked yourself that? Is the way you spend your money look different enough from your pagan neighbours in that it threatens sinful or unethical businesses – locally or abroad?

Let's take the extreme but commonplace example that falls out of our text – you'll see why in a second. Think about pornography. What if we saw wide spread revival in young men in Canada; would that not threaten this industry? By the way 78% of woman in one survey accessed porn in the last 6 months – a Canadian study...<sup>5</sup>

Listen; know that every time you access porn, you are TITHING INTO **THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS**. That's a 98 billion dollar a year business of evil, that you are donating to if you pay for it, or support through advertisers if "you get it for free". That's possibly more than Netflix in 2018!<sup>6</sup> Every one of those "actors" is somebody's little boy or girl. And worse, much of it is *actually slavery*. And when you access it, you are paying to keep them enslaved. Think about that, it is not just "your personal struggle." I say this with love, and with truth - Christian, how dare you pay into that. Authentic Christian living should affect that industry's bottom line. [O for the day they go bankrupt due to the Gospel!]

Commented [GP2]: Don't riff this. READ IT.

This was what was happening in Ephesus. The market for silver idols wasn't the only thing in decline from the working of the Gospel. So was the cult sex trade and practices. You see Artemis was a fertility God as I. Howard Marshall explains:

"She was represented as a female figure with many breasts (according to the usual interpretation of the imagery) and an image of her was placed in the great temple at Ephesus which ranked as one of the seven wonders of the world. The festival of Artemis was celebrated with wild orgies and carousing."<sup>7</sup>

Just like our culture, Ephesus was a culture steeped in sexual liberties. But as more and more people came under the lordship of Christ in Ephesus and surrounding area, the economy attached to the cult of Artemis was weakened. Imagine if something like that happened today? Local Pimps moving out of town, and women in bondage being freed because Orillia was "unprofitable" to selling sex – because of revival! Or imagine if other industries profiting from "VICE" and sin and enslavement took deep

<sup>5</sup> J Sex Marital Ther 2018 May 19;44(4):343-353. Epub 2018 Feb 15.

When Pornography Use Feels Out of Control: The Moderation Effect of Relationship and Sexual Satisfaction

<sup>6</sup> <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/porn-could-bigger-economic-influence-121524565.html#:~:text=That%20said%2C%20revenue%20estimates%20for,completely%20accurate%20estimate%2C%20He>

lmy%20says.

<sup>7</sup> I. Howard Marshall. Tyndale NT Commentary of Acts. Accessed through Olive Tree Bible Software.

financial hits because of revival. No longer Marijuana shops on every single corner in our town! Or the casino gambling portfolio shrinking because of drops in revenue, because of the Gospel! This is what happens when Christians make Disciples; Christian living becomes a threat to sinful practices and business!

Secondly, the city riots because

## 2) False Gods were exposed

Look again at verse 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.” Acts 19:27

We know from multiple historical records and our text that Ephesus was the location of the Temple of Artemis. This was big deal! One scholar reminds us:

“The temple of Artemis, about one and a half miles east of the city center, was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. The giant marble temple belonged to the seven wonders of the ancient world”<sup>8</sup>

This is WAY BEYOND mega-church level! This is a seven wonders of the world level! This was worship on a massive scale! People made pilgrimages from vast distances to participate in the cult of Artemis and the temple – and the city loved their Temple. They loved the “sexual freedom”. They loved the status. They loved the income. And the CITY LOVED THEIR GODDESS.

And when Jesus came to town to de-throne her, there was indeed trouble. People were furious. That is what happens when a culture’s loves and values are up-ended and challenged. They get angry and disoriented. Think about the major idols we have in our country.... We have talked about two already – money and lust. If we push on those, people get angry.

But what about another. Brothers and sisters, Autonomy or Individualism is a powerful god in our midst. He is a PRINCIPALITY dominant over western culture! And when his worship is threatened, **his** worshipers get angry! Consider Euthanasia, or Abortion. What is the value or god at the centre both of these flash points - Autonomy... **MY** RIGHTS. My right to my body over that of a baby, My right to end

Commented [GP3]: Idols are other orientations, Consider keller

<sup>8</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 783.

my life how I want. Does the culture not riot against God's ways on these issues? And doesn't the Gospel uncover the selfishness and superficiality of this worldview?

Or what about the twin gods, daughters of mammon, called Consumerism and Materialism. They hold great power in our culture, convincing people to tithe and make offerings based on the empty promises that they can fill the void of purpose in our hearts, sooth our anxieties and grant us unmixed pleasure and happiness. But the Gospel shows the vanity of this pursuit giving us true purpose and lasting joy.

Or the shape-shifter goddess called Entertainment. She appears so innocent and innocuous, and sneaks into our homes through many portals and media. She promises satisfaction, but her ambrosia really just anesthetizes you, numbing you and distracting you from God's call on your life.

I know it sounds weird to call "Materialism" or "Autonomy" a god. I personify them on purpose. The Greeks did, and that was the context Paul was ministering in! Materialism is a god, especially when it becomes ultimate, if it becomes the thing in life we desire most, THE THING WE TRUST IN TO GIVE US PURPOSE AND HAPPINESS. Listen to what Martin Luther says:

"Whatever your heart clings to and confides [trusts] in, that is really your god"<sup>9</sup>

Our Canadian Culture really does trust in its wealth for hope and security. To which our God breaks the illusion by saying:

'And God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Luke 13:20

Canadians really do worship the self – Autonomy to their detriment, just like the Ephesians. Listen to Paul writing to Timothy, whom he left in Ephesus:

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant.... But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all" 2 Tim 3:1-2, 9.

And Christian discipleship and teaching call out these false gods as the frauds they are – these gods and their empty promises are exposed. And this destabilizes a culture's worship and worldview.

**Commented [GP4]:** "These references demonstrate that the worship offered to idols in all the nations surrounding Israel was really worship of Satan and his demons. This is why Paul can say of the false religions of the first-century Mediterranean world, "What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20). It is thus fair to conclude that all the nations around Israel that practiced idol worship were engaging in the worship of demons. The battles the Israelites fought against pagan nations were battles against nations who were controlled by demonic forces and thus "in the power of the evil one" (cf. 1 John 5:19). They were as much spiritual battles as physical battles: the people of Israel needed to depend on God's power to help them in the spiritual realm as much as in the physical."  
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**Commented [GP5]:** [YOUR MONEY]

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<sup>9</sup> *Large Catechism* (1529) 'The First Commandment'

So we see the gospel caused a RIOT in Ephesus because the economy of sin was threatened and because the gods of the city were exposed. But here, I want to stop and make an important observation about this story. When we say that the gospel *caused* the riot, are we saying that Christians took to the streets in protest? Is that the example we find here? Who started this riot?

### Excursus: Who started the Riot Anyway?

This is so important to see: it is not the Christians who start the Riot! The Riot starts because the Church is changing the culture from the inside like yeast in bread. Recall the Words of Jesus:

“He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” Matthew 13:33

The Kingdom starts small and moves through the whole loaf FROM THE INSIDE. The kingdom is not like the Baker who pounds and shapes the loaf from the outside, it’s like yeast, subversive, changing the structure of the bread from the inside. Paul Carter says it this way:

“the call is to build and maintain a community of contrast. We are to stand tall, to hold our ground, to build our communities, to raise our families, to cherish our beliefs and values and to shine out the light in a dark and dying world.”<sup>10</sup>

“Christianity is subversive and opposed to seditious. We spread like yeast and DESTABILIZE cultures, we do not start riots and burn down the house.”<sup>11</sup>

This riot was not about Christians rallying for their rights or trying to wield the power of the government. This riot came about because as the culture responded to disciples being salt and light, bearing witness to Jesus!

Normally this is really a minor point in the text. But given recent events during the pandemic, I think it needs to be stated explicitly. Notice in our narrative today it’s the government comes to the rescue and diffuses the riot. Just like in Acts 18 with the proconsul Gallio. We as Christians need to be very careful about dismantling institutions. Those institutions are often the tool wielded by God TO PROTECT HIS PEOPLE. Remember we are quickly becoming the minority. Be careful what you wish for.

All that said, if we find ourselves in the riot, how do we respond?

Commented [GP6]: We didn’t start the Riot... music  
It’s the culture raging cause their worship’s fading,  
We didn’t start the Riot...

<sup>10</sup> Pastor Paul Carter. Into the Word: Life 100.3 edition 23:45 min mark.

<sup>11</sup> Pastor Paul Carter, personal communication preaching workshop 2024

## How do We Respond in Upheaval or Public Scrutiny?

### 1) Listen

Notice how Paul listens and weighs the advice of his brothers and sisters in Christ. When we are under the microscope and threatened, or publicly being opposed we are often not at our best. We can have our tempers flare, we can lose our nerve, we can say things clumsily or hurtfully. So seek good counsel like Paul.

“But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him.” Acts 19:30  
Paul was no coward, having received beatings, imprisonments and death threats for years by this point. He certainly had the courage to go into the mass of people if it meant that some would hear the Gospel and repent! But in this case Paul accepts influence. The principle is very clear:

LISTEN TO BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST WHEN FACING PUBLIC OPPOSITION! Don't forget you are representing more than yourself in the riot of public discourse! You bring your Church into it too, and the cause of Christ! Let wise brothers and sisters speak into your situation. King Solomon says:

“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” Proverbs 15:22

Weigh what is said. YOU MAY CHOSE TO EXERCISE THE OPTION OF NON-ENGAGEMENT. Not all Riots need our involvement. As we see in this story, God can competently manage the situation through other means.

Secondly, in the Riot,

### 2) Pray

Paul later will go against the advice of his friends and walk straight into conflict and hostility. In Acts 21 we will see him head straight for Jerusalem after being warned he would be imprisoned by the prophet Agabus. What was the difference? Here in Ephesus he heeds his advisors, and in Chapter 21 he rejects their advice. The answer is found in verse 21

“Now after these events Paul resolved *in the Spirit* to pass through Macedonia and Achaia *and go to Jerusalem*” Acts 19:21

Paul was *under the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem*. Luke tells us this is clearly what Paul felt:



“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, *constrained by the Spirit*” Acts 20:22

So putting it all together, it is true when we face the riot or public opposition we ought to accept influence of trusted brothers; but it is equally true that we must SEEK AND LISTEN to the Holy Spirit. The process is: LISTEN, weigh what is said, PRAY and seek the Spirit, and ONLY THEN act.

In the case of this riot, exercising the option of refusing to engage was the path of wisdom. What I think was going on here was Satan was trying to bait Paul into unnecessary conflict. That is a common tactic of the enemy, distracting us from the Big Picture with useless side battles (quests). God can navigate those side battles without us! Which brings us to our third point:

### 3) **Wait**

In the preaching workshop we talked about how easy it is to get overwhelmed when under public scrutiny or opposition. There is a temptation in the Riot, to only see the Riot! And yet, with all the fuss and the city in an uproar, it quickly passed. Luke points out, half of the rioters didn't even know why they were there! Levi recalled “Remember a few years ago when a local church was being picketed every Sunday for a month because of their views on sexuality and it was all over the news? I bet that many of you don't, or you forgot until now. And that's the point. The riot looks like EVERYTHING when you're in it”. Luke wants us to appreciate that. Often God calms the storm before we need to act.

Many times as Christians we can overestimate opposition in our **lives**. I think this becomes even more true as the divide between culture and us expands. As we overestimate opposition it triggers our fight or flight response. Paul was tempted to jump in, but instead wisely listened and waited, and very quickly the riot fizzled to nothing, letting Paul continue on to his mission:

“After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.” Acts 20:1

That's an important lesson for us, we aren't always very good at waiting. This leads us to our last point:

### 4) **Trust**

I suspect we would be better at waiting if we were better at trusting. We need to remember God is Sovereign. Perhaps not drawn straight from our text today, God's Sovereignty, **IS** a central theme of Acts. Luke is careful to show us things are going precisely according to HIS pre-determined plan. The Kingdom of Heaven is expanding just like Jesus said it would. Remember the “table of contents of acts” found in chapter 1:

Commented [LD7]: Very true. Make sure people hear that.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’s words are becoming true. The riot in Ephesus is at “ends of the earth” stage of Jesus’s plan. The yeast starting small and filling the whole dough is actively happening. The world is being leavened by the witnesses of Jesus Christ! The structure of the dough, the structure of the culture is changing. The Kingdom is coming!

The Riot isn’t proof God has lost control of the situation. Remember what the disciples said in Jerusalem:

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed’

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to *do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” Act 4:25-30

A riot doesn’t mean that God is distracted or indifferent or asleep. TRUST HIM. He has a predestined plan. He may just shut the riot down through other means.

So as we close we have just one more comment to make.

In our text today, we see God’s sovereignty getting Paul off the hook so to speak. It is tempting to walk away from the text and think God will always release us from the angry crowd. I mean I like that ending! But that’s why we have to read our whole Bible, and never construct theology from a single verse. Remember earlier, God’s sovereign plan lead to Steven’s martyrdom. Later we will see that same predestined plan imprison Paul. We will not always have the outcome we want. But will always have the outcome God wants. We MUST TRUST. His plan is advancing, he has planted His Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And that should be a comfort to us.

Prayer:

Thank you for your Word, how it rebukes and encourages, cuts and heals – faithful are the wounds of a friend! Some of us today need to respond to your Word today by re-aligning our spending. We feel you

telling us our spending and pursuits of money and materialism looks more like our pagan neighbours, and we still have altars to false gods in our homes. Forgive us Lord, and show us the path to change.

Some of us today need to hear that we don't need to run into every battle. Some of us need courage to enter the fray.

All of us need to hear that you are over it all. Nothing escapes your sight. You are in control. Help us to rest in that knowledge when you quell the riot. Help us rest in that knowledge when you don't quell the Riot and we are sent to prison and worse.

Lord commit us to your hand and your plan, to whatever you have predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon the threats of the culture and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.