

Acts 19:23-41

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[0 : 00] Hello, St Silas. My name is Rob, and it's a real privilege to be talking this evening and looking at this passage. Let me begin with a confession.

Only once in my life have I found myself in a mosh pit. Now, to tell you the truth, although it was quite fun being caught up in the hype, it was mostly just terrifying.

It is just a crowd of people who are fueled with adrenaline, and they're just shouting and hitting each other. But as we have seen from our Bible reading, that's the kind of scene that we have on our hands tonight.

Last week was part one in our time in Ephesus, and this week is part two. If you missed last week, you can always go back and watch it on the YouTube channel.

But the thing for us to know from part one is that people received the Holy Spirit, and this caused a great disturbance in their lives. This week in Ephesus part two, we are thrown into one big mosh pit where non-believers have not received the Holy Spirit, and they have caused their own disturbance.

[1 : 25] At one point, we'll find them shouting in unison for two hours. Can you even begin to imagine how loud, how powerful and intimidating that would be?

Well, that's where we'll be spending time tonight, so let's pray, and then we can get started. Father, thank you for bringing us to this story in Ephesus.

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And you should know I've split the passage into three sections. We're going to start in the middle of the three, because I want to jump straight into the riot. Then we'll look at how the riot started, and then we'll look how it ended.

The riot where we begin is placed within verses 28 to 34. So let's jump straight into the action. Our people in the mosh pit are furious.

[2 : 51] They are shouting, verse 28, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Something has caused them to proclaim the greatness of Artemis.

As we read on into verse 29, Soon the whole city is in an uproar. Everyone pours into the streets, and they charge to the theatre, a bit like the bull run in Spain.

And on the way to the riot, they take hold of two poor chaps, Gaius and Aristarchus. Who are they? Well, they are two people who have been working with Paul, ministering in Ephesus over the last couple of years.

Can you imagine being them right now? Picture the whole city charging along the road, chanting, fueled with adrenaline and hate, and they're coming towards you, pointing right at you.

Now, I might be wrong, but I don't think Gaius and Aristarchus would have looked like the lads you get today standing outside the subway with nothing but a name badge and a leaflet.

[4 : 07] Now, I think Gaius and Aristarchus are going to be used to mobs and riots, probably more like the burly fishermen that travelled with Jesus. And yet I can imagine even they were terrified, being dragged along with this crowd into the theatre.

And the crowd must have been extremely dangerous, because in verse 30 we can see how Paul, hearing about what was happening, wanted to go out there, but other followers of Jesus and even some of the officials of the province stopped him from attending.

In fact, we read in verse 31, they were begging Paul not to venture into the theatre. The whole scene of the riot feels dangerous and chaotic.

Look at the madness of verse 32. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.

Imagine being part of something as dangerous and as loud as this riot, but not even know why. We also see in this section, this is not just a group of people who believe in the pagan religion, but there

is also a Jewish faction.

[5 : 29] In verse 33, they put forward this poor chap, Alexander, who makes a half-hearted attempt to defend his faction. But this just triggers two hours of united shouting, great is Artemis of the Ephesians, two solid hours.

This is without a doubt a great disturbance. But what causes a disturbance like that? Well, let's look at how the riot started and bring us to our first point, the cause of a great disturbance.

And this means moving to verses 23 to 27. Our passage begins with the words about that time, which assumes we know what has been happening.

Well, what do we know about this world we're in tonight? Well, if you were to Google Ephesus, you would probably see that it was the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis.

It was a humongous and very impressive temple where people would go to worship the Greek goddess Artemis, one of the daughters of Zeus, amongst other things.

[6 : 45] During this point in history, if there were one word to describe Ephesus, it could easily have been power, religious and economic power.

But it's important not to miss that the riot isn't just about religion. It's not just the fact that about this time, the word of the Lord has been spreading and growing in power.

No, economically speaking, there is a lot resting on the worship of the goddess Artemis. It is at the center of the system that keeps the city working and growing.

So what has been happening in this religious and economic powerhouse that is Ephesus? That would cause such a great disturbance.

Well, as we saw in part one of our time in Ephesus, the word of the Lord is gaining power. The gospel has come to town.

[7 : 49] And when the gospel comes to town, the world gets turned upside down. And we've seen this time and time again in the book of Acts, that when the kingdom of God is extended, it causes a great disturbance.

Because as we've seen time and time again in the letters from Paul, when you believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit, you will live a pattern that follows a different logic to the world, a different mindset, one that is opposed to the world and its way of thinking and acting.

And in some ways, it's not a choice, but a result of having received the Holy Spirit. Let me give you a contextual example from Ephesus part one.

After Paul had been preaching for about two years to the people of Ephesus, we read in verses 19 and 20, just before our passage, that a group of people who had practiced what is called sorcery publicly burn all their stuff, a total value of 135 years of wages, because they had received the Holy Spirit and as a result, they see and value things differently.

As a follower of Christ, they live a pattern that follows a different logic to the world, a different mindset, opposed to the world and its way of thinking and acting.

[9 : 25] They see value in having their present lives disturbed now for a future security. Take a moment to place that in our context today.

Imagine the porn industry decided that in no way does pornography bring glory to God. In no way does it align with the teachings of Jesus.

In no way does it reflect the life that Jesus lived. And so everyone just shut down this multi-billion dollar industry that some figures suggest is financially bigger than not only Netflix but also Hollywood.

What if everyone involved in the industry let go of present financial security because they valued a future security? Well this is the dynamic of what happens to people when they receive the Holy Spirit.

Suddenly they value things very differently. But the silversmith named Demetrius in our passage, he was not interested in believing in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 38] He was not willing to be changed and transformed. He says in verse 25 he's only interested in receiving a good income.

Demetrius was in the God-making business. He was heavily invested in worship at the temple of Artemis because his business produced all the silver shrines of Artemis.

And these would be sold in and around the temple for people to buy and take home to worship in their living room. This was big business. So you can imagine what he was thinking when he saw a

load of people publicly burn the value of 135 years of wages because they had joined the way the follower of Jesus Christ.

Demetrius has been confronted by the gospel. He might not have wanted to hear that Jesus came to take on our sin and die for us at the cross and through his resurrection we can have eternal life. But he has been confronted with the gospel because of the way it's changing the lives of believers around him. And that's the same as it works today.

[12 : 04] Before I believed in Jesus I can remember how I was confronted with the gospel. When I met people like Darren who took us through Ephesus part one I was confronted with the gospel because of those of us who believe and receive the spirit there is something different about us because we are being transformed and people notice.

And so when people are confronted by the gospel there will be a response. Unfortunately like many Demetrius responds negatively.

He remains against Jesus. He gathers together people who work in the God making industry and says to them verse 26 this guy called Paul he has led astray practically the whole province of Asia. Paul says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. Now isn't this absurd? What does Demetrius mean by led astray?

Does Demetrius really think human hands make gods? I wonder if Luke is having a little flirtation with irony as he presents this to the reader for us as a reader Paul's argument that gods made by human hands aren't actually gods for us that's such an obvious and simple object it's hard to imagine anyone in disagreement.

[13 : 43] And yet think of all the man-made things that we worship or the man-made products that we value or seek comfort and rest as opposed to God's word in the Bible.

For Demetrius the real issue is spelled out in verse 27 the God-making business is in danger danger of losing its good name or in other words losing its wealth economic disaster and even from a religious point of view it's still quite absurd Demetrius says that if they are unable to make gods with their own hands the temple will be discredited and the goddess will be robbed of her divine majesty but if this is true if Demetrius believes this to be true if the fellow tradesmen believe it to be true if the whole city who come out in an uproar believe it to be true then they are saying the truth about the divine majesty of the goddess Artemis is that she is entirely reliant on the manufacturing industry what a strange goddess she gains power through the manufacturing and selling of goods her divine power comes from economical power and so in defense of their industry and apparently in defense of their goddess they take to the streets and they start this powerful and terrifying riot but maybe the world isn't absurd maybe

Demetrius isn't being absurd maybe he's being completely ordinary a normal human being just like many of us at times who you know who have this longing for security a longing for comfort a longing for something visible that we can trust those guys who burnt the value of 135 years worth of wages did not do an ordinary thing becoming a Christian isn't necessarily an ordinary thing it's not a comfortable lifestyle choice we are inviting a great disturbance into our present life life but we rest assured there is a certain future security and glory when you're drinking tea and coffee after the service why not spend time thinking about what this might look like in our world today take a moment to consider the great disturbance of the

Holy Spirit in our present lives perhaps some questions you could think about what about a Muslim who converts to Christianity in Britain what about the person who graduates from uni with a promising career and then decides to serve God's kingdom by going on mission overseas if they had non Christian parents or friends what would they think about that person prioritizing the gospel what about asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the areas in our lives where we are trying to protect ourselves from a disturbance identifying where we are holding on for present security and comfort instead of focusing and shaping our lives on a future with Christ if you're a non believer and you found yourself at this talk then after the service you could ask yourself what do you value in life are they things that look powerful and everlasting now but are actually dependent on our own addictions and misery are they things that give us a false sense of security love well now you much loveton ■ theatre at the hands of the rioters, we read in verse 35 that the city clerk arrives and quietens the crowd. He then proceeds by giving a speech that ends in verse 40. He chooses his words very carefully. It's impossible to tell which part of his argument causes the crowd to give up the goose and go back home. But as you can see in verse 35, he starts with a question. Doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her

image, which fell from heaven? The city clerk is challenging their logic against their belief. He says, verse 36, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash.

[19 : 13] Why are they so worried about undeniable facts? How can a goddess be weakened by the acts of humans? If Jesus isn't really the son of God, and if God doesn't even exist, then what are they worrying about? Why are they so offended by the gospel if it isn't true? And verse 37, he points out that Gaius and Aristarchus, who they've captured like criminals, they've neither robbed temples nor blasphemed their goddess. And so basically, everyone might as well just go home. If you've got a problem with anything, verse 39, then you'll just have to file a complaint and it'll be settled in court.

In fact, it's the rioters who are in danger of being in the wrong for the very act of rioting when, as the town clerk says himself, there is no reason for it. And so they all went home. End of scene.

After that potential blockbuster of action and drama, we are then faced with a very bland and seemingly weak ending. Verse 41, after he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. They just went home. And in case you're wondering what happened to the goddess Artemis, well, if you Google the temple of Artemis today, you'll see the undeniable fact. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the thing they were all placing their value in has now turned to a pile of rubble, no longer in existence. So I guess all the people who were heavily invested in the worship of Artemis, both religiously and economically, got it all wrong. What they valued is now dust and rubble, and so are they. Perhaps rather than holding on to their investment in the temple of Artemis, they should have noticed the way the word of the

Lord was spreading widely and growing in power. And maybe, rather than being angry at Paul and his teaching, they should have listened to him and become part of the way, a follower of Jesus, turning to God rather than turning to dust and rubble.

Here's a question. Why do you think Luke, the author of this book, gives us a story with such a bland ending? Why does he write about such an exciting riot with such an unexciting ending?

[21 : 57] Well, this brings us to our third and final point, the implications of a great disturbance. So why did Luke bother with this story that has such a bland ending? In order to answer this, we must think about our passage last week in comparison with this week, Ephesus part one and part two.

In Ephesus part one, people receive the Holy Spirit, their lives are changed, but they lose their money. In Ephesus part two, people don't receive the Holy Spirit, their lives are unchanged, but they keep their money. And I think that's what we're meant to be seeing here. In Ephesus part one, people walk away from the scene with their lives changed. They have lost their money and the means to acquire it, but they have gained something invaluable. In Ephesus part two, people walk away from the scene with their lives unchanged, so unchanged it's barely worth reading. But they've kept their money, their means to acquiring it. But they walk away from the scene looking like they've had a tantrum.

Their dad has said to them, stop, look, you still have your toys. If you want to keep them, they're yours. Stop crying. Well done, Ephesus part two, people. You've stayed the same and you've kept your present security. Ephesus part one, people hear about Jesus, they believe and they receive the Holy Spirit. As believers in Jesus, their lives are transformed. It won't be easy, their worlds will be turned upside down, but this great disturbance in their world is because they have gained something invaluable. They now live in a way that will transform them from a life scratching around in the dark to a life of light. A loss of present comfort and security for a future life in a city that does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the lamb is its lamp.

Ephesus part two, people don't want the Holy Spirit to disturb their lives, so they themselves generate a brief disturbance to defend and protect their present state. But it doesn't end in glory. It's an end fairly worth writing about. So I think God is asking us, are we going to be his people?

Like the people from Ephesus part one? Or are we going to be against him, unchanging and unmoving, like the people in part two? Is our greatest desire and priority number one, receiving the Holy Spirit with our lives being constantly transformed because we believe in Jesus Christ? Or do we just want to receive financial security, comfort and satisfaction in our present moment, investing in what looks powerful now but will in the end? Are we willing to live as believers in Christ and see the disturbance of having the Holy Spirit in our lives as something truly great, allowing the gospel to spread throughout our lives rejoicing by how it turns our world upside down? Let's pray. Father,

thank you for letting us see the way the

[25 : 58] Holy Spirit transforms people's lives. Help us to grow into believers who are constantly transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Believers who have a desire for the people around us to be alive in faith, valuing what is true and eternal. Let everything you have spoken to us tonight sink deeply into our hearts and minds. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.