

Jesus vs Idols

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[0 : 00] Which you can find on page 1116 of the church Bibles. And we're going to be reading from verses 21 to 41. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said, You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited.

And the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty. When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theatre together.

[1 : 46] Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre.

The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him.

He motioned for silence in order to make a defence before the people. But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

The city clerk quietened the crowd and said, Fellow Ephesians, 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?

Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.

[2 : 50] If then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges.

If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today.

In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it. After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. Thanks, Amy. St. Silas, good evening. Great to be with you and a real privilege to be opening up God's Word.

My name's Tim and I'd love for you to pray with me as we come to read these words together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks to us.

And we don't have to guess at who you are and what you've done, but you've given us your Word. And so we pray that as we come to Acts 19, that you might expose our hearts, that we might come before you as we really are.

[4 : 01] And that we might be receptive to what you have to say to us through these words. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me tell you about teenage Tim. Teenage Tim was a relatively run-of-the-mill teenager. I was okay at school.

I had a bunch of mates. And I had my dreams. My dreams as to what my life was going to be and what was going to happen in it. I had dreams of getting a job that was impressive to people.

And hopefully, I was able to earn some good money along the way. In my circles, it was not upper crust, but it was kind of, you know, respectable middle class. And in that, it wasn't sort of appropriate to sort of be out there with a desire to earn huge, huge money.

That was there a little bit. That was probably a quiet dream. But the thing that really drove me as a teenager was to have the approval of others, to be impressive to other people.

[5 : 05] Now, I was also a Christian. And my Christian life was sort of alongside the rest of my life. Not in a particularly mature way, but that's sort of how it was.

I went to church. I went to youth group on a Friday night. That was my duty to God as I saw it. God was God. I was not. This was what I was supposed to do in order to, you know, keep Him happy with me or something like that.

And so, I sang songs. I shared my faith. I read my Bible. I fought temptation. I did the Christian thing. And I did those things out of duty. And if I enjoyed any aspect of my Christian life, well, then that meant to my teenage mind that I was doing it for the wrong motive.

It would mean I was doing it for me and not for God. And so, that was my Christian life as a teenager. At the beginning of my final year of high school, I read a book that tracked the theme of joy through the Bible.

And as I started reading it, there was a part of me that immediately didn't like it. But soon I was convinced from Scripture that joy was what God expected Christians to find in Him.

[6 : 20] And I didn't like that. You see, I had it worked out in my mind. My Christian life was over here. The life that I enjoyed was over here. And I liked that they were separate.

I didn't want the two to mix because it would threaten the things that I loved about life. And what I didn't see at the time was that my desire to be impressive, the temptation of wealth, and the way that I was wanting to pursue those things, were idols in my life.

Things that were competing for my time. Things that were competing for my energy. Things that controlled my emotions, clamored for my worship.

And then God got whatever was left over. There's an Australian poet called Les Murray. In one of his poems, there's a line that says, The true God gives His flesh and blood.

Idols demand yours off you. Idols control you and take from you. And in our Bible passage for tonight, we're in the city of Ephesus.

[7 : 33] And in Ephesus, the unstoppable word of God has come to the city and it is clashing with the idols of the city.

The headline for our passage, if you want that, Jesus versus idols is a battle to the death. And Ephesus, this is the city that the letter to the Ephesians was written to, it was a city in the ancient world that was famous for their goddess Artemis.

Jesus and Artemis cannot coexist as Jesus comes to Ephesus. But Artemis is not the only idol in the city.

And as we open up Acts 19, as we look at this together tonight, we'll see an individual responding to the threat that Jesus is to His idols. We'll see the mob responding to the threat that Jesus is to their idols.

We'll see the city responding in a similar way. And all three of them pay lip service to Artemis, but there are other hidden idols going on in their lives that are actually controlling them.

[8 : 47] So, let's open up to Acts 19. If that's happened to be closed in the Bible in front of you, open that back up. And we're going to start our time together by thinking of the idol of self-advancement.

Now, this is our first step back into Acts, the series, Acts series we left last year. We're picking it back up tonight. Let's get up to speed quickly. Acts is a book that's written by a guy called Luke. He's the same guy who wrote the Gospel of Luke.

And these two books are kind of two parts to the story. In the first verse of Acts, he says, in my former book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

And so, the suggestion is, therefore, that Acts is the story of what Jesus continued to do and teach after He'd gone up to heaven. Now, He was working through His disciples.

And our Bible reading picks things up in Acts 19, verse 21, where Paul says that He must visit Rome also. You see, as Jesus has gone up and He's empowered His disciples to live for Him and carry His word out, the message has spread and it's spread throughout all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[10 : 00] Rome is sort of the centre of the world in the first century. And so, the last ten chapters of the book are the story of the Gospel getting to Rome. And so, over the next few weeks, we're going to be walking through these final ten chapters of the book.

And in chapter 19, that spread of Jesus' message has hit Ephesus. And it causes people to be unhappy. Have a look at verse 23. About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way, that is, the Christian faith and Christians living for Jesus.

A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said, you know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. So, this guy, Demetrius, has gathered together all the people who are, you know, craftsmen in the city of Ephesus.

And he gathers them because he feels a little bit threatened. Artemis was a big deal in Ephesus. Her name means safe and sound. The understanding of the people was, so long as we worship Artemis, well, then we will be safe and sound.

[11 : 17] We will continue to be happy. We will continue to prosper. And that's especially true for Demetrius, because he has built his livelihood off the little industry around Artemis.

They want to worship Artemis. He ensures that they can, for a price. And so, it's an interesting question to ask, well, what God does Demetrius serve?

Does he serve Artemis? Or does he serve his own personal wealth? His own financial security? His own advancement?

And idols are like this, often in our lives. This is true whether you're a religious person or not. Often in our lives, there are presenting idols, the ones that are obvious, the ones that are on the surface.

And then there are hidden idols. Presenting idols are conventional gods, you know, like statues or symbols, or there are other religious practices, or there could be the secular equivalents of those.

[12 : 21] It could be the sport team that you just fanatically follow. It could be work. It could be family. It could be your physical appearance. It could be anything. If there are things that your friends or your family would say, you care way too much about that, or you just spend too much time on this, it might just be that those things are functioning as idols in your life.

But those things are generally the presenting idols. That's what generally you can see from the outside. And underneath the presenting idols are hidden idols.

The things that you crave. The things that you fear. And the presenting idol helps you to satisfy the cravings of the hidden idol.

The tribesmen in Papua New Guinea who engage in child sacrifice to appease their tribal god, don't do it because they love that.

They do it out of fear that if their god is not appeased, then their tribe gets wiped out. The man who throws the remote control when his football team concedes a goal.

[13 : 40] Perhaps he's just desperate to succeed at something in life. And if his football team does not succeed, well then where will his success come from? There's something like that going on here for Demetrius.

Artemis is the presenting idol. His desire to preserve his own financial security is actually what's driving his actions though. Verse 26, he says, And you see, and hear, how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. Jesus is a threat to the idols in the lives of individuals.

Jesus is a threat to the world. Jesus is a threat to the world. The message of Jesus that is spreading around the world in Acts is that the only true God has stepped into this world. His name is Jesus.

He was crucified by sinful people, but he rose from the grave. He rules this world and he calls all people to repent of their sins, to repent of their false gods, to repent of their idols and follow him.

[14 : 55] That's who God is. That's the message of Jesus that is spreading out throughout the book of Acts. And idols are threatened by that.

Any being other than he is not God. And Jesus will reveal that. And so as Demetrius' idol is threatened, his true idol, his hidden idol, he does actually realize what is at stake.

Look at verse 27. He says, He's speaking to the other craftsmen here, trying to protect his own hidden idol. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited.

He says, will be robbed of her divine majesty if she's not worshipped.

If Artemis is not worshipped, she stops being majestic. that's the difference between the true God and idols between the true God and false gods God does not need anything from you to be God but idols feed off you Demetrius recognizes that if Artemis is not worshipped by people then she has no majesty she is only majestic if people are pretending that she is her majesty is built on the lies however devout they may be it is built on the lies of her worshippers her majesty rises and falls as her worshippers rise or fall almost nobody on earth today considers Artemis to be majestic in contrast Jesus is majestic whether you worship him or not the worship of Jesus the acknowledgement of his lordship the recognition of his rule doesn't change him changes us because as we bow the knee to Jesus we start walking in the light we start seeing truth we start living in God's universe the way that we were created to do so we live in a world that is full of idols

[17 : 50] John Calvin one of history's most decorated theologians described the human heart as an idol factory and as you sit here tonight and you consider the call of that spreading message of Jesus on your life the call to follow him wholeheartedly what part of you feels threatened what is the thing that you don't want to give up it might just be that that is an idol something that is in your life that is not worthy of your obedience and yet at the moment you are giving it anyway in your life as in the world Jesus verse idols is a battle to the death and Demetrius was unwilling to turn to Jesus and so in response he stirred up his co-workers this is our second point for tonight the idol of mob identity have a look at verse 28 when they heard this he's talking about Artemis losing her majesty when they heard this they were furious and began shouting great is Artemis of the Ephesians and soon the whole city was in an uproar the people seized Gaius and Aristarchus

Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia and all of them rushed into the theater together verse 32 the assembly was in confusion some were shouting one thing some another most of the people did not even know why they were there it is hardly a context for wise living or thoughtful decision making and as we keep reading we see the idol of the mob verse 33 the Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front and they shouted instructions to him he motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people but when they realized he was a Jew they all shouted in unison for about two hours great is Artemis of the Ephesians for the mob this was a matter of ethnic identity who was this outsider coming in here telling us how to live and what to do they were paying lip service to Artemis but only because Artemis belonged to their tribe and when someone who is not ethnically Ephesian wants to speak he gets pulled down he gets shouted out he gets cancelled

Ephesian identity must be maintained at all costs as the message spreads Jesus versus idols is a battle to the death and that means that the mob is threatened I love watching social media outrage I mean I don't but I do you might know when we prayed for the church plan in the east you might know that I'm involved in that as part of that we posted a video on Facebook and on Instagram a few weeks ago and the video explicitly stated that it was inviting Christians who lived in the east to come to an information night to come and find out more about what it was all about you would be mistaken or you could be mistaken for thinking that people might just think oh well let's just leave the Christians to do their thing but no there are 106 comments on that video with all sorts of abuse and helpful commentary there was the usual stuff you're a cult this city doesn't need more expletive churches my favourite was the gentleman who suggested who suggested that if God is real he should fix the potholes in the east the east of the city care a lot about the quality of their roads all great fun but of all those comments the thing that there is a distinct lack of is neutrality outrage culture is perpetuated by strong opinion that's what gets the popcorn emojis out that's what makes people read these things and so on just about every issue that mob will form an opinion and that mob will form an opinion and they will both hold it absurdly strongly there is little capacity for nuance there is no patience for listening the mob tends to be controlled by very deep seated fears you know that it is hurting people who hurt there are a lot of hurting people in mobs what makes someone comment on a post that has nothing to do with them probably something somewhere inside them that feels threatened it's interesting to think about how the mob is interacted with here by the Christians

Paul wants to appear in front of the mob in verse 30 but wiser heads prevail because people who will chant six words for two hours can't be reasoned with on mass it's not a context where truth is going to win so if it is that you're checking out Jesus let me suggest to you that as thankful as I am for Christian YouTubers and I am the comments section of any social media platform is not the best context to learn who Jesus is and how to live for him the best place to be is here or another church like this where the Bible is taught and Christians can sit with you they can listen to your questions they can respond carefully thoughtfully you need to get away from the mob and root yourself in a church that teaches God's word it's the only place where that God has promised to grow his people so having seen idols we've seen the idols in Demetrius in the individual we've seen the idols in the mob our final point for tonight is the idol of civic stability because the mob eventually gets quietened by the city clerk have a look at verse 35 the city clerk quieted the crowd and said fellow Ephesians 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 again don't you love how the temple of this god

Artemis needs humans to be the guardians of her temple it's another subtle hint as to who is actually powerful between the idols and Jesus verse 36 therefore since these facts are undeniable you ought to calm down and not do anything rash and so the city clerk he steps up and he pacifies the crowd the Christians aren't actually doing anything illegal Demetrius and craftsmen so calm down you're being foolish Artemis will always be honoured here if you have a grievance against the Christians go through the proper channels now the city clerk is not a Christian however in God's sovereignty his people are protected by governments who are bringing order it's a little theme throughout these last ten chapters of Acts that in God's sovereignty governments are strangely receptive to the Christian message because Christians in the book of Acts are upstanding citizens they are doing nothing wrong you can't discredit them it is purely the power of the gospel that is carrying them forth but life is rarely as simple as governments just wanting to do the right thing and do honourable governing everybody has a boss even city clerks it turns out and in this city clerk the looming threat of his superiors breathes just a little bit of insecurity verse 40 shows why he cares so much about this riot as it is we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today in that case we would not be able to account for this commotion since there is no reason for it who could the city clerk possibly get charged by why does he need to account for the city who does he need to account for the city's actions to

[26 : 16] Rome Ephesus was in the Roman Empire it was a free city in the Roman Empire everybody has a boss and in the Roman Empire you could do just about anything you wanted as a city so long as you kept the peace the Pax Romana Roman peace was a critical aspect of Roman civilization and if a city like Ephesus became a place where rioting and mob violence was happening the city would be under very close Roman supervision Tacitus and Josephus are both first century historians and they tell of times where local governments were sentenced to mass crucifixions because of minor uprisings because here's the thing about civilizations like Rome they prospered because everyone knew that Rome and the emperor could flex his muscle when he wanted to there was enough fear that filtered down so that everyone stayed in line even city clerks that's how Rome spread that's how Rome maintained its order but Christianity is a different story

Christianity spread in a completely different way many civilizations and world views are like Rome they spread through the sword through power through military conquest Christianity in the book of Acts and really throughout 98% of Christian history has not spread that way instead of the sword it has been the word the word about who Jesus is and what he has done for his people now Jesus is more powerful than anyone or anything else but that isn't why his message changed the world he brings rest to the restless and he brings peace to the fearful teenage Tim had a wrestle between my idols and Jesus and I spent about 12 months at the end of high school first year uni sort of wrapping this round in my head eventually

I got to a point where I gave up fighting I remember praying one night in my room I just said Jesus you win whatever you want me to do in life I will do and I wasn't joyous in that moment I was sort of I felt defeated because all I could see was that my dreams had been taken away but what I didn't see was that I was free because when Jesus died for me my sins were paid for and I was adopted to have all the privileges of my brother Christ now because of my sins sometimes my desire for people to be impressed by me creep back in and still creeps in now every now and then but the difference is that now in those moments I know that in Christ my heavenly father looks at me in the same way he looks at his son he is pleased with me the opinion of people it actually doesn't matter the true God gives his flesh and blood idols demand yours off you the poem that that line comes from is called the muddy trench and those words come on the lips of a dying soldier in battle someone who followed the idols of country mob and self he followed those idols to death and as he dies he has a fleeting glimpse of the uniqueness of Jesus and a fleeting glimpse of all that he has missed in his entire life as the idols led him to where he is what has he missed

Jesus needs nothing from you Jesus doesn't take from you he doesn't need to he's utterly different to everything else in the world it's why the book of Acts tells of an unstoppable message the message is that at the center of the universe there is not a being who takes from you there is a man the God man Jesus Christ who gave his flesh and blood that your sin might be paid for and that you would be reunited with him where all your true needs are satisfied so whatever it is that has a little bit of control over you whatever it is that you struggle with that you fear the thing that causes spikes of anger or worrying heights of excitement the conviction of the Bible is that you're searching for it in the wrong place if you're looking in the world as you come to Jesus you repent of your sin you trust in him you won't necessarily find a life that is easy but you will find a life that is healthier you will find a life that has hope has love has forgiveness you won't find that in wealth you won't find it in the mob you won't find it in the city you will only find that in Jesus as he stands in your life and the idols die let's pray father thank you for Jesus thank you for the utter uniqueness of Christ that where everything in this world leaves us thirsty

Christ is living water bringing us all that we really need would you help us all to find our life in him amen