

Series: Acts 10: One More From The Road

Message: Week 4- Defending a fake god

Date: January 30, 2022

- **Continuing in the THIRD- and last- missionary journey we have recorded in Acts.**
- **The bulk of Paul's time on this journey has been spent in the very significant Greek city of Ephesus-**
- **What happened in Ephesus is among most significant sections in all 3 of Paul's missionary journeys, and what we've covered over past 2 weeks is building toward what's going to happen today...**
- **SO, lets start with a..**

† Recap: What has happened in Ephesus...

- **FIRST...**
 - Paul's encounters with the followers of JtheB (19:1-7): Faith in Christ isn't just about repentance and forgiveness. It is about the presence and power of the **SPIRIT.**
- **Dominant theme throughout Acts! Most important ingredient in everything we've seen happen was the Spirit of Jesus, present and at work in the lives of the Apostles and believers, as the gospel and church grew across the Mediterranean world.**
 - The Hall of Tyrannus (19:8-10): The power of being a faithful **SOWER.**
- **For two years Paul would work in the morning, then when everyone else took their mid-day break, he would teach in this rented space, to a constantly changing flow of people. It's possible, if not probable, that Paul himself never saw the fruit of these efforts- but Luke, with the hindsight of a historian, tells us that through this ministry the entire region of Ancient Asia came to hear the word of God.**
- **Then, last week, we saw the danger of...**
 - Faking the name of Jesus (19:11-20): **But really, this story is about...**
The power of the miracle of **CHANGED LIVES.**
- **NOW, before moving on to big riot about to happen, Luke inserts an interesting note, foreshadowing what is going to happen once Paul leaves Ephesus.**

Acts 19:21-22 After all this had happened, Paul decided (in the Spirit) to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²² He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

- **NIV just says "Paul decided to go to Jerusalem", with a footnote that says "OR, in the Spirit"... Interesting, because the words "In the Spirit" are in the text, and most versions translate this "Paul decided in the Spirit"... Why did NIV omit this phrase?**
- **Turns out the Greek is nuanced... On one hand, you could put emphasis on what PAUL decided, but on other hand, it's clear Spirit is involved. Sense of this is Paul wrestling with what he will do next, and is prayerfully placing his plans before God with a desire to be led by the Spirit, not just by his own plans.**
- **SO, as Paul looks all the way toward Rome, once again Luke emphasizes...**
 - Paul looks toward Rome: **The paramount importance of the leadership and work of the SPIRIT.**
- **Reminds us of what Jesus said...**

John 15:5 Jesus: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

- **OKAY.. on with the story. What happens next might be the biggest riot in Paul's entire career, and Luke calls it the 'Great Disturbance'**
 - **To really grasp significance of what's about to happen, we need to know a little about Artemis and Ephesus... why city exploded the way it did.**
- † The great disturbance: Artemis and ancient Ephesus
- **FIRST- Artemis. As we touched on last week, Artemis (Diana in Roman mythology), was daughter of Zeus, sister of Apollo, and Goddess of fertility, among other things. Cult of Artemis was one of the most widely followed in the entire Greco-Roman world.**
 - **Historians have identified 33 shrines, most significant here in Ephesus. Temple of Artemis was four times the size of the Parthenon, is considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world, and was the single largest structure in the Greek world.**
 - **In short, worship of Artemis dominated the spiritual, cultural, AND- importantly- economic life of Ephesus. It's impossible to overstate this significance.**
 - **Ephesus was also known for its majestic civic amphitheater, able to seat around 24,000 people. One of best preserved ancient amphitheaters still in existence today.**
 - **Ephesus itself was an incredibly important city, with a population of 200-250k people, making it one of the largest cities in the world at that time.**
 - **SO, picking story up from last week: spread of the Gospel throughout Ephesus is changing lives, so much so it is impacting cultural and economic foundation of city.**
 - **People are openly confessing their faith in Christ, and burning their scrolls and religious artifacts dedicated to worship of Artemis.**
 - **THIS gets the attention of one DEMETRIUS, a leader among the artisans who make good money creating and selling these religious objects.**
 - **Key thing to see is gospels impact in Ephesus has grown to point where some of city leaders feel a LEGITIMATE THREAT against the economic, cultural, religious foundation provided by worship of Artemis.**
 - **THIS IS INCREDIBLE. The leaders of one of largest and most influential cities in the entire Greco-Roman world are looking at this brand new Christian community and thinking... "THIS COULD BRING EVERYTHING DOWN"- this could destroy our way of life by destroying worship of Artemis, and by extension, the power and prestige of Artemis herself.**
 - **One more key thing: Demetrius and the people of Ephesus didn't feel threatened because Paul/church were directly challenging, speaking against, or demeaning the worship of Artemis. NO- they felt threatened because people's LIVES WERE BEING CHANGED by the gospel.**
 - **SO, let's read the story, want to...**

† Getting to the core issues.... First issue- just need to...

- Follow the money

Acts 19:23-25 *About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.* ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ 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.

- **Archeological finds suggest that the shrines Demetrius made were small replicas of the temple. FOR HIM AND the people related to this business, Artemis was more than just a religious object. The IDOL of Artemis represented their financial security, their sense of purpose, and their sense of IDENTITY.**
- **This gets to what idols really are. They are things we look to not to worship for their own sake, but because of what they PROVIDE for us. For these people, Artemis was how they were able to MEET THEIR NEEDS.... Hold that thought.**
- **As we continue, Demetrius gets to the core of what they saw to be Paul’s heresy...**

- **Paul’s heresy**

Acts 19:26 *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. (acknowledge how much gospel has spread) He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.*

- **THERE IS THE ISSUE. You see, Paul had not directly spoken against the worship of Artemis... his crime was much worse. In preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ, Paul proclaimed that there was only ONE GOD, and this God is NOT something, or someone, we create OR we control.**
- **THUS, all these other gods people have created- these idols- had NO POWER to provide what people TRULY NEED. Artemis, and all idols, were EXPRESSIONS of the human condition- peoples attempts to create God on their own terms....**
- **BUT JESUS CHRIST- the GOSPEL- WAS THE ANTIDOTE TO THE HUMAN CONDITION. The hope of forgiveness, mercy, Grace, and a NEW LIFE were GOD is our source of security, purpose, and identity- NOT things we create ourselves.**
- **AND SO, to Demetrius and everyone whose lives were vested in the cult of Artemis, this message was-**

- **An existential threat**

- **Listen to what D says... remarkable confession!**

Acts 19:27 *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 worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”*

- **The fear wasn’t just economic. Demetrius feared the temple worship would be impacted, and that Artemis herself- GREAT GODDESS worshipped throughout the whole world- will be robbed of her divinity!**
- **IN SHORT, this small, dispersed, hodge-podge community of people who professed faith in a God with Jewish roots- whose great act was getting lynched and killed by his own people- this movement lacking any political power, financial resources, buildings, and whose primary teacher was an intenerate tent maker who had been beat up and run out of virtually every community he had visited, and even now was teaching in a rented building no-one else would use because he used it during the heat of the day when the rest of the city took a nap--- because he had been rejected by his own people-**

- **THESE ARE THE PEOPLE** whose message was seen as being on the verge of undermining the most influential and powerful religious system in the Greek speaking world, and whose temple was the largest work of architecture in the entire ROMAN world.
- You've got to wonder if Demetrius recognized great irony of his fearing for the safety of the great and all powerful Artemis from the threat of this small and rag-tag group who called themselves "The Way."
- **BUT HE DID FEAR THIS!** That's the kicker! Demetrius didn't hate the Christians because of their morals or they believed differently.
- **NO!** He genuinely feared the entire cult of Artemis was in danger of being discredited by how **PEOPLE'S LIVES WERE BEING CHANGED**.
- **AND SO** when the people of Ephesus heard what Demetrius said, they concluded... **WE'VE GOT TO PROTECT OUR GOD! WE must DEFEND our IDOL.**

✠ Defending our idols

Acts 19:28-34 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"²⁹ Soon the whole city (**one of largest in Roman world**) 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.

- **This would have taken some time- crowd moving through the streets, growing in numbers as mass riots do, until the mob fills the amphitheater, probably numbering in the range of 20k people.**

³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

- **Quick note- Paul plays a minimal role in this story. Being Paul, he wants to get up and take the crowd on, but calmer heads prevail. Interesting detail- Luke says that some 'officials of the province' were friends of Paul- these likely would have been Roman officials. This speaks to the Paul's level of influence in the community, AND THE REALITY that Paul, and the church in general, DID NOT HAVE an adversarial relationship with the Roman authorities.**

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. (**Classic riot! Could say the same about mass riots we have seen in our own country recently**) ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him.

- **Really not sure who Alexander was- Jewish, but probably not a believer. One theory is the local jewish community feared being lumped in with the Christians) He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people.**

³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

- **Church, this is a stark picture of what it looks like when our idols are threatened. Remember, an Idol is something we look to as our SOURCE- what we look to for our needs, security, identity- OTHER than God.**
- **When our idols are threatened...**
 - **We can get defensive. Angry.**

- **We can become emotionally compromised, irrational, reacting in fear rather than wisdom...**
 - **BECAUSE of this... we can be easily manipulated by those who would exploit our fear for their purposes.**
- **But as followers of Christ, when we are living in dependence upon God and our character are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, WE WILL BE DIFFERENT!**

Reality! *God will never lead us to ‘defend’ him by reacting with the resources of our flesh (such as our own agendas, intellect, emotion). Rather, GOD will lead us to respond with the Fruit of the Spirit, acting as agents of reconciliation, not ‘Christian soldiers’ intent on defeating God’s enemies.*

- **HUGE lesson for us! In our hyper partisan and divided culture, many people- in name of Jesus and Christianity- see themselves as warriors whose job is to protect/defend God and a Godly society from the attacks of those they deem to be God’s enemies.**
- **FAR TOO OFTEN, this activity is ugly, intellectually dishonest, and most of all, ROOTED IN FEAR.**
- **Because here’s the deal. When it comes down to it, people really don’t try to defend their idols. We seek to defend what our idols DO FOR US.**
- **HERE’s challenge. If I find myself stressed, angry, emotional, NOT RATIONAL because something important to me is being threatened.... I MAY NEED TO ASK: Have I granted whatever this thing or issue is a place of idolatry in my life?**
- **Even if this thing or issue is GOOD in and of itself... HAS this become my primary source of security, hope, identity- something I look to or participate in to MEET MY DEEPEST NEEDS- to provide me with what ONLY GOD CAN PROVIDE ME.**
- **If so, small step for me to see those in opposition to my idol as enemies who must be defeated.**
- **BUT IN CONTRAST, CHRIST IN US- the nature and character of God in us, and the teaching of scripture- will see these people not as the enemy to be defeated, but as captives who need to be set free!**
- **Likewise, through a NT lense, we are not ‘Christian Soldiers’, marching off to war, but AMBASSADORS who invest our lives in loving and caring for the enemy.**

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

- **WHO IS GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL TO? To the very people we so easily might deem to be our enemy.**
- **Story continues, and the work of the Spirit just becomes clearer and clearer. Right when things could have gone from bad to worse, these two companions of Paul (whose lives were in very real danger) receive some....**

✠ Unexpected protection

Acts 19:35-41 *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? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash.*

- **(basically, if Artemis is so powerful, why are so you afraid! Chill out!)**

³⁷ You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.

- **Time and again, the Christians were accused of disturbing the peace, of causing trouble. Every time, the governing authorities looked at the evidence and said “no, they aren’t!”**

³⁸ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

- **The city clerk wouldn’t have been a Roman official, but likely the top locally elected Greek official. At considerable risk to himself, he gets up, calms the crowd, rebukes his own people, protects these believers, and in doing so essentially proclaims the church’s right to exist without fear of attack.**

– **WHY DID HE DO THIS?**

- **On one hand, he may have been a genuine believer in the cult of Artemis. “If Artemis is really our god, why are we so afraid of this rabble?” This is reminiscent of Gamaliel reasoning with the Sanhedrin all the way back in Acts 5- “If what these people represent isn’t really from God, they just ignore them, and they’ll fade away.”**
- **But the clerk’s last words reveal what I think is his greater motivation. He, and the city, are under long standing Roman occupation and authority- and the Romans prized- almost above all else- law and order. The clerk’s position and own safety could have been in jeopardy from the Romans if the riot had continued.**
- **AND SO, what really protected the church on this day was the presence of ROME. Not the last time this will happen.**

† **TWO** Key takeaways

- **When attacked, the church in Acts never defended itself through protest, political actions, or attacking those in opposition.**
- **This should be a somber reminder to Christian culture today- where many people, including Christian leaders- are engaging in this type of activity.**
- **The church in Acts didn’t attempt to change the surrounding culture through moral imposition or coercion. Rather, the community of believers profoundly influenced the surrounding culture through the testimony of their own changed lives.**

Scenario: If the entire Christian community in Eagle County decided God was calling us to transform our valley by reaching everyone with the Gospel and Hope of Christ... How would we go about doing this?

- **If we used the current methods and examples of Christian culture, we might do things like this:**
- **Hold big events. Big name speakers, attract a crowd, hold a concert- put on a top notch performance to show people who we are and what we believe.**
- **Hire or recruit top Christian thinkers and strategists. Put together a 5 year plan with measurable goals and objectives.**
- **Political action.**
- **Protests against what we see as things in our culture opposed to God or what we- as Christians- want society to be.**

- **ALL of these at times can have merit, and can be good. The problem is we don't see ANY of these in how The Spirit moved to take the Gospel from 100 people in a single room in Jerusalem, to spread across the entire Mediterranean world, and have such a profound influence that the Ephesians were afraid their own goddess would be toppled.**
- **On the other hand, if we looked at this calling through the lens of Acts and the broader NT, we would slow down, probably spend more time in prayer.**
- **We would highly value the fellowship among the community of believers, grow in our own faith, AND SURRENDER TO GOD'S WORK of change and transformation IN OUR OWN LIVES, in our own character, integrity, and kindness.**
- **The result, inevitably, is that WE will worship God, first and foremost, by how we LOVE EACH OTHER and LOVE THE COMMUNITY AROUND US.**
- **We will work to make people's lives better and our community a better place. Rather than seeing ourselves as Christian warriors bent on imposing God's will on our surround culture, we will be ambassadors who profoundly influence our surrounding culture by the testimony of God's goodness and love, shown to all by HOW WE LIVE, and declared to all by the gentle and consistent message of Jesus and the Grace of God.**
- **This is what we see in 1 Peter 2...**

1 Peter 2:11-12 *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. (BE TRANSFORMED!) ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

- **Or, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16...**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

- **THANK YOU for joining with us today. NEXT WEEK Paul will begin a long and somewhat circuitous journey back to Jerusalem. We'll find Paul back in the city of Troas, where we'll see an example of the great danger of falling asleep in church!**