

Acts 19:21-41

Persecution and Providence

8/14/16

*After all this had happened, Paul decided 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. 23 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. 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. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. 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.” 28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” 29 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. 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. 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. 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. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” 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? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 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.*

*(Pastor prays)*

What is it about the simple truths of basic Christianity that make it so terribly inconvenient? Why, in this passage do Paul and the other Christians (Gaius and

Aristarchus) find themselves in the throws of an anti-Christian, pro-pagan riot? Honestly it can sometimes feel like we are actually living in an anti-Christian, pro-pagan riot that seems to shoot down the truth claims of Christ and biblical Christianity. And its past time for Bible believing Christians to quit being mad about not being the majority. We are a minority. We are exiles in a world that is not our home and while we are here in exile, we live our lives for the one who died in our place and we do it with unmitigated joy. Even then we are persecuted. There is a disturbance in the text. The Gospel that Paul preached turned people away from idolatry (the Goddess called Artemis). They quit buying little silver idols and it affected the silversmiths and they put on a public demonstration that threatened to turn violent because it upset the status quo and threatened a way of life but that's what Jesus Christ has always done. That's what he is doing now. If you're not a believer, you should know that the Jesus of the Bible is here to demolish your inadequate worldview and to redeem your empty lifestyle. And because of that, we don't bemoan persecution. The church thrives (history tells us). The church thrives on persecution so lift up your heads and know

### **Jesus Destroys the Easy Life**

Ask Paul, the disciples, martyrs - Christian heroes

#### **I. Jesus Has an Upsetting Effect**

It's right there in the text. In v. 21-22, Luke is giving us some basic commentary on Paul's plans, what he hoped to do. Jerusalem, Rome Spain. But for the mean time, he is staying in Ephesus. V. 23 says About *that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.* "The Way". It sounds almost cultish to our ears. "The Living Bible" The Way was an early title Christians had for themselves. It probably came from what Jesus said in John 14:6, *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* That's disturbing. The Way is disturbing because it crashes into pseudo-religious materialism.

The Way is disturbing because it is exclusive. Just listen to the language of Jesus in John 14:6 *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* And down in v. 26, the complaint is that this Paul has gone through Ephesus and Asia and persuaded a great many people. Jesus has an upsetting effect. We sing it all the time. "In Jesus alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm." And just saying The Way implies there is no other. It doesn't make us shout with pride, it ought to burden us with the love and hope and thankfulness because all of our insipid, trite ways of trying life are like ant people in a snow globe, reaching for meaning and being desperately lost. Somethings disturbing that or little truths and quips and sayings are lie chaff I the wind. To find out there is one sovereign Lord of all time and eternity that has given us Christ to live perfectly, die on a cross in place of sinners, be raised from the dead so that you might be awakened in your heart to see the beauty and love and mercy of this good God. But it can be upsetting to know that all of your efforts are not the way. Jesus is the way. Jesus has an upsetting effect. The way is exclusive.

#### **II. The Way of Jesus is Offensive**

Obviously the townspeople in Ephesus are offended. V. 23 says there is no small disturbance. In fact, let's read from v. 23-27 with some comment. *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. 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. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. 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."* gods – made with hands, aren't gods. The utter absurdity of that statement seems to reflect the zeitgeist of our day. The spirit of the day we live in when people are offended at what seems to be the most basic of truths about God. The truth is that the world we live in should be shocking but it shouldn't be a surprise. Paul tells us in Romans 1:24-25 *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.* I mean that's the problem in the text. The Gospel of Jesus challenged their idolatry and their money is what Demetrius, the chief instigator, said in v. 27. And it's tempting to become culture warriors and address symptoms rather than the real issue. In the text, the riot is just a symptom. Idolatry, a symptom. Homosexuality, transgender, abortion, murder, racism – these are all symptoms. Symptoms we all have. Your sin just might be more respectable than mine. Gluttony, pride, foul-mouthed, lustful, jealous, gossip. And without Christ, we are idolaters. Money, success, our children, golf, cars, retirement, travel ball. And what is true in the text is true for us all. Tim Keller wrote a book called *"Counterfeit Gods"*. Listen to what he says. *"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living."* All of this is symptomatic to a soul that doesn't have Christ. A soul that doesn't see the beauty and authority and Lordship of Christ. And the authority of Jesus will always challenge the idolatry of our hearts. He doesn't accommodate our idolatry. That's a false Gospel. Polytheists. You worship Jesus and your idol. Jesus and Artemis. So getting past your worldview and political persuasion and cultural leanings. What is so important to you that is absorbs your heart and imagination more than God? It is someone? What do you seek to give you what only God can give you? Something that if you lost it, you don't think your life would be worth living. Whatever it is, that's an idol and Jesus will not share his Lordship with a counterfeit God. So today, I'm asking you to look and see a bigger, more powerful, more beautiful God. A holy Creator God whom created you, man, in His image.

*(Pastor shares the Gospel message and prays)*