

The Riot in Ephesus
Acts 19:21-41

God is the only God, the true God; there is no other. We sing of that, and it just so happens to be what we're going to be looking at today as we're going to look at an incident in Ephesus, a riot in Ephesus. If I were to quiz you and say where in the Bible is the riot in Ephesus? I probably would get, is there a riot in Ephesus? Not too many memory verses come out of this section of Scripture. Cody gets to teach on Jesus walking on water and the feeding of the five thousand. There is a lot of text here on the riot in Ephesus. In fact, if you have a comparison, because Luke wrote a gospel and included the feeding of the five thousand, there's probably three times as much material that we'll be covering today on the riot in Ephesus, as he included on the feeding of the five thousand. As far as of Jesus walking on the water, he didn't even include that in the gospel of Luke. So, somehow, in this story, there's some significance to this. And I think I'm going to make an attempt to help you to understand why there's so much information here and why this is so important. So, turn in your Bibles to Acts 19:21-41.

We'll be looking at this account. And to orient you, we are in the third missionary journey of Paul. The second half of the book of Acts deals with the gospel going to the known world. The first half was centered in Jerusalem, and now with Paul and beginning with Acts 13, we're seeing an advancement of the gospel to the first missionary journey in chapters 13 and 14, in the area of Turkey, this northern part of the Mediterranean. The second missionary journey goes all the way to Greece. The focus of now the third missionary, which we find in Acts 18:23 to 21:16, is the city of Ephesus. The city of Ephesus is really the spiritual capital of the Roman Empire. It's on the coast of the Aegean Sea, on the far western side of what's modern-day Turkey in the province of Asia (the western end of this land mass). Rome was the military, the political capital of the Roman Empire. Athens was the cultural capital of the Roman Empire, and Ephesus is the spiritual capital of the Roman Empire. We saw that in the last section, of the Spiritism and the issues of evil spirits. And now, we're going to look at that with idol worship in Ephesus.

But before we get into that, there's an interlude that Luke provides for us, and this is dealing with the course to Rome. Ephesus, at the time, was a large city. This is the theater of Ephesus, seats twenty-four thousand people. It's

still there, sixty-six rows. They even have concerts there. Ephesus isn't a town, anymore, that you, really, live in. It's just ruins these days, but to give you an idea of the magnitude of this city, it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. Rome was clearly the biggest, but then, all the missionary journeys started in Antioch. Then, we've got Alexandria on the northern Egypt on the Mediterranean Sea, and Ephesus would be like the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. So, we're dealing with a substantial place.

Paul is speaking of the desire to go to Rome in verses 21-22, and this interlude that Luke writes for us is so common in the book of Acts where we find a reference to a place that we're going to get to before we actually get there. And, like, we see characters, that will be focused on later in the book, being seen in a cameo appearance earlier in the book. So, we see this happening here in Acts 19:21; "Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'" So, Paul's travel plans emphasize this final destination of Rome, and we will see that, this desire to visit Rome comes out in the Epistles to the Romans. He writes in the first chapter, he writes in the fifteenth chapter of his desire to visit Rome, and what we'll find as we move through the book of Acts - God's sovereignty in Paul's arrival to Rome. He will get there. The latter part of the book of Acts is dealing with Paul in Rome. That's where we're headed. This is this precursor to that.

There's more going on here, we see, with Paul's words and with Luke's writings in verse 22, "And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia [that's the western province] for a while." So, Paul stays where he is in Ephesus and sends Timothy and Erastus. What is not stated here, but we find in other parts of the New Testament, is the reason for all this. So, the purpose of the ministry of Timothy and Erastus to the believers in Macedonia includes a gift, and a gift that will be sent by them, by these churches in these areas of Greece, to the church in Jerusalem. We see that spoken out later on in Acts 24:17 and a chunk in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 speaks of this gift that's being collected. So, what does that tell us about Paul? It's not just his preaching ministry where he goes publicly to large crowds of unbelievers, it's not just a teaching where we find him for two years in Ephesus in Acts 19:9-10 where he's teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, and the believers and the surrounding areas are coming there to learn, his focus is much more

broad-based and multifaceted where he's coordinating ministry to churches in different areas, bringing help and assistance from more able areas to needy areas with the Jerusalem church. So, that's not given to us here, but that's what's going on, but this is simply a bit of a reference to Rome. That's where we're going to be headed after the third missionary journey.

Now, on to the riot - there's a cause for this disturbance, and let's read about the cause of it. In verse 23; "About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way." The Way is what early Christianity was known as in the early church. "For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.' " So, this is his concern.

This temple of Artemis that he was concerned about is truly ruins today, hardly anything left of it, but in its day, it was regarded as one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. This is the largest building in the Roman Empire in Ephesus. This is Super-Bowl Sunday, so I'll give you a comparison just with a football field. It's longer than a football field. In fact, it's probably fifty percent longer than a football field, and maybe a hundred yards wider than a football field. It was a massive structure for its day and was a focal point for people to come, to travel, to visit Ephesus to see this place and to worship this goddess, Greek god Artemis. Artemis in Greek mythology is the daughter of Zeus the brother of Apollo and was high-profile in the goddess world, but Ephesus was sort of the home field because it had the temple of Artemis. Okay. So, that shows you what the attractiveness and the emotional attachment was of the Ephesians to this goddess, this Greek mythology.

In this, Demetrius was concerned because of Paul's teaching about Greek gods, and he was correct in this because, with the growth of the gospel and people believing, and we hear back in Acts 19:10, that "...all who lived in

Asia heard the word of the Lord...,” and it was growing. And we find, you know, the areas of what we find in the churches of Revelation, Revelations 2, 3 - Laodicea, Colossi, Smyrna. These churches were established at this time where the gospel has gone to these surrounding areas and believers had been built up and there’s a result of that. The growth had affected the industry that Demetrius was busy with. He made these trinkets, these shrines of Artemis. And for all the people that were traveling to Ephesus, or by sea, visiting Ephesus, they would come and they would be able to purchase these, sort of, like, souvenirs if you will. So, his business was effected, and he was, rightfully, for his own prosperity, concerned about this.

1 Corinthians 8:4, which, by the way, 1 Corinthians was written during this time when Paul was in Ephesus. He wrote to the Corinthians and taught them that (while he was in Ephesus) there was no such thing as an idol. So, just to orientate you here, we speak of Artemis; there’s no Artemis. This is a made-up idea. These idols that the world worships, these false religions, are just in the mind of man ascribing value to this. And the reason to even mention this is because even to some degree, even into the conservative realms of Christianity and certainly in many other corners of Christianity, people sort of have this belief that if you come across an idol then there’s some significance to this, and it might corrupt you, or there might be some demon associated with it. It might negatively affect you. So much so that there’s some thought that you need to go look in your attic or make sure that any effect of any idols is no longer a part of your household. You know, all this is meaningless. There’s nothing in the idols. There’s just stuff here. It’s just matter. It’s atoms. There’s nothing to it. The only thing to it is what people ascribe to it. When people see significance of it, that’s the problem, not the hunk of steel.

Psalm 135 says, “They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear...” It’s worthless, but people ascribe value and the Ephesians ascribed value to this temple and were concerned that it was being disrespected, and Demetrius was very invested in this because of his own personal pocketbook. Paul did not teach directly against Artemis. We have nothing in the Bible about that, but he clearly taught the result of the gospel included turning from idols to serve a living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). So, there’s an inherent result in believing in Jesus. The belief in Jesus means following Jesus, and all this other stuff becomes worthless, unimportant, useless. So, the result of this following of

Jesus by many people in Asia, this province in western, modern-day Turkey, is a detrimental effect on Demetrius' business and the workers with him. You know, there's no more certain way of getting people upset than affecting their income. You can pretty much take that to the bank, can't you? When people's income starts to get affected, they have issues with this. And we see this, and this triggers this riot that we will read about.

As believers follow the truth of God's Word, society and our society will see a result and even a financial impact because believers have certain values, certain priorities, that should be driven by the Bible, the Scripture. And a desire to follow God means lack of interest in so much other things that the world is so excited about, and there's a financial implication for these things as well. So, this is the setup. It's driven by the finances.

What else then happens? There's a confusion in the riot that gets caused. Verse 28; "When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" You can see the home field that the Ephesians held to Artemis. They've attached Artemis to themselves; "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Verse 29; "The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" ...two hours of this pep rally for Artemis of the Ephesians.

You might think, man, that's a long time, but remember there's going to be a lot of shouting for about three and a half hours this afternoon about a football game. People get really excited about certain things and give a lot of energy to them, and that's what happened in Ephesus. We have this pep rally. Go Artemis! Give me an "a." Give me an "r." So, this energy that's being driven toward Artemis has created uproar. They don't even know why

they're even gathering in this, and this uproar is in this theater that still exists today. There's still these ruins that you can sit in, and that's where this was happening, the centerpiece of Ephesian community.

So, we have the difficulty that happens with Gaius and Aristarchus. They get dragged out. So, they're sort of captured, and Paul naturally, then, wants to go and be with them, but we have other people now encouraging him not to, that's the disciples, and "Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his..." So, who these Asiarchs were, they weren't people who were his coworkers in the gospel, Asiarchs were educated, socially involved men of influence who were politically minded. They had influence. They were mucky-mucks, if you will, in the society and the surrounding region of Asia surrounding. So, they had inside knowledge, and they were cautioning him, and therefore, this friendship that he had with these people proved helpful, and he didn't look to oppose the leaders of Ephesus. He was able to make friends with some of these people, and this turned out to be helpful to him. So, it reminds us of his words in Romans 12:18 that said, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." That's what he was doing. His attempt to try to communicate the gospel didn't move him to denounce people, but he was able to embrace the friendship of these people, and that turned out to be for his benefit at this point in time.

There's another fellow that we read about named Alexander that was put forward by the Jews. So, this Alexander was a Jewish unbeliever who attempts to distance the Jews from this uproar because the Jews, like the Christians, they weren't worshippers of Artemis. So, this wasn't putting them in a very good light. So, he attempts to speak, to distance himself from what's going on with Paul. The crowd saw really no distinction between the Jews and the believers of Jesus. They just saw all of this as being anti-Artemis, and they were all riled up. So, Alexander gets put down as well. The Jews kind of were in the same boat here.

So, why do we have this story? Why do we care that there is this upheaval? Well, I think the answer is coming up with what transpires after this. What's left is the conclusion to the uproar. Verse 35; "After quieting the crowd, the town clerk..." Now, the town clerk is not just some guy counting heads there, how many people are there or managing the finances. The town clerk is similar to the local mayor who oversaw the affairs of the city. So, that's what the town clerk is. So, he had a position of great influence and power in

the city. So, he takes the lead, and “After quieting the crowd...,” says this, “Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?” By the way this image is considered, historically speaking, to be a meteorite that they had then carved into an idol, and it was in the temple of Artemis. That’s what that’s referring to. Verse 36; “So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.’ After saying this he dismissed the assembly.”

So, he basically calms everything down. His goal was to quell the riot, and he gives four reasons of why this thing should be disbanded. So, to march through these, the first two verses of this, verses 35-36, he basically says we all know that the temple of the great Artemis is well known; “So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.” So, let’s not rush into anything. He was a wise fella who understood that we should consider the outcome before we act, and he was concerned about the outcome. So, he gives them advice. Let’s “...do nothing rash.” Let’s not act before we think. So, he takes control and leadership.

Then, the next thing is about Gaius and Aristarchus, these people who had been captured now. These believers, these companions of Paul, they had not robbed anything. They’ve not blasphemed. So, from his perspective, they had not been guilty of anything worth getting all excited about. And I think we can take away from this there’s no need for us to be attacking unbelievers. They didn’t rob the temple. The Christians didn’t attack the temple of Artemis. They didn’t blaspheme the goddess Artemis; that was not their focus. Their focus was on Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead and should be followed and believed in. So, we aren’t that concerned about what goddesses that people are worshipping. We’re concerned that they worship the true God and His Son Jesus Christ. Just stopping people from idol worship accomplishes nothing without a true worship of the Lord Jesus

Christ. So, if we preach Jesus and Him crucified, what happens when people really understand who Jesus is and believe in Him? The rest of this stuff they turn away from. They turn away from idols and serve the living and true God. So, Gaius and Aristarchus, they were not blasphemers of the goddess according to the town clerk.

Next, he says there's a proper way to bring charges. Every society has this. There's a system of justice. Yeah, it gets messed up at times, but there's some fashion of a system that is to be abided with. And he says, hey, there's some protocols here to go about this. Don't go off half-cocked. And the reason is because if they do that (this is verse 40) is they get all riotous. What's going to happen? What's going to happen is the provincial authorities that he's responsible to are going to be upset at this, and they're going to come and make things difficult for the people of Ephesus. Because of why? Governing authorities don't want riots. Governments value peace. All governments value peace. Why? Because the people in charge of the governments are benefiting from being in their position. So, this sort of stuff doesn't help them out. So, they're trying to quell this stuff. They don't want difficulties like this. So, these truths are very useful and show why this is so important. Because, in the end, Ephesus becomes quieted and becomes a peaceful town as opposed to, say, Philippi.

Remember what happened in Philippi where, Paul and Silas, they were arrested? The economy of the city was similarly considered threatened. But the chief magistrates, they arrest Paul and Silas, that created difficulty for ministry in Philippi. The freedom granted to the church here had significance in the early church. What ends up happening as we go forward here is Ephesus becomes a centerpiece of Christian ministry. Jerusalem was the beginning of the center of Christian ministry in the first parts of Acts. Later, when we get to the second century, Rome will be the center of Christian ministry. Certainly, by the fourth century, Rome is the center of Christian ministry. But for the second half of the first century, it's Ephesus.

In fact, if we look at the Christian leaders in Ephesus, we can add them up here. Aquila, Priscilla, we find them in the end of Acts 18 in Ephesus. Onesimus, he was a slave that had been encouraged by Paul to be received back, a runaway slave be received back from Philippi, by Philemon his owner who was in Colossi a neighboring town. He ended up being a church leader in Ephesus in the next decade. Right now, we're in the middle fifties,

like, 56 AD. Onesimus, in the next decade, would be a leader of Ephesus, so would Timothy. When Paul writes to Timothy, 1 Timothy 1:3, where is Timothy? He's in Ephesus. And finally, when we get to the gospel of John, where is John writing the gospel of John from? Where is John writing his epistles from? He's writing it from Ephesus.

So, Ephesus becomes the place by which Christian ministry flourishes, and the reason for that is because God has sovereignly orchestrated a peaceful climate for this to happen. So, we have in our place a peaceful climate for ministry to thrive. People came from Ephesus. Different places... Timothy wasn't from Ephesus; he was from Derbe. Aquila and Priscilla came from northern Galatia. Paul was from Taurus. They ended up in Ephesus. We, today, have come from various places. Some of us were born here. Some of us have moved here. And we now live in, actually, an area... the Antelope Valley is roughly equivalent to the population of Ephesus, and we have this opportunity, like they had this opportunity, to influence the community for Jesus Christ, and we have a wonderful opportunity to take advantage of that because of the peaceful atmosphere that's around us. We have the freedom to do this. We can be faithful in this, and the church of Jesus Christ can be built up accordingly. So, may God sovereignly guide us through these upheavals that take place, to bring us to where we can serve the Lord according to His will because God has given us opportunities, and we can be faithful with these opportunities to speak on behalf of Jesus to the people around us in our community.