

Acts 19B

- Paul has determined to make his way to Rome
 - And the story of how he gets there dominates the rest of the story of Acts
 - Last week we ended on v.22 as Paul is making preparations to leave Ephesus after nearly three years

[Acts 19:22](#) And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

- But Paul isn't quite ready to leave the city, and before he leaves an incident breaks out

[Acts 19:23](#) About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.

[Acts 19:24](#) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

[Acts 19:25](#) these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

[Acts 19:26](#) "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.

[Acts 19:27](#) "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."

- Luke uses his typical understatement to set the scene
 - There as no small disturbance concerning the Way
 - What Luke meant to say was there was a really big disturbance
 - The phrase in Greek can be understood to mean a great riot
 - The reason for the riot in Ephesus was the Way, or the preaching of Jesus
 - More specifically, the riot was the product of a silversmith Demetrius
 - Luke says the man made shrines to Artemis

- These were amulets or small icons that represented the massive temple for Artemis or Diana
 - Remembering that the temple was the center of the city's commerce and many historians believe it was the most beautiful building ever built
 - The worship of the goddess Artemis dominated this part of the world and brought many visitors and drive the city's commerce
- When Luke says the silversmith brought no little business to the craftsman, it means this man was the leader of the guild of silversmiths
 - Remember we learned in a previous week that craftsmen operated under the authority of a guild, like a union, and the work was assigned by the guild
 - Craftsmen couldn't work without the approval and direction of the guild
 - So this man could control the livelihood of all the silver craftsmen in the city of Ephesus
- Demetrius uses his authority to command an audience among the silver craftsmen
 - They probably assembled in the guild at first and Demetrius warns the men that their prosperity was at risk
 - Notice that his concern is first and foremost about his income
 - Later he will appeal to the religious pride of the city, but his real interest is money
 - He begins to describe the reason for his concern in v.26
 - He reminds them that they have all seen and heard of Paul's preaching of the Way in Ephesus
 - And he says this message has reached all Asia
 - While this statement may be exaggerated slightly, it's largely accurate as we described last week
 - And he adds that it has influenced a considerable number of people to say that idols like Diana are no gods at all

- What a remarkable testimony for Paul's ministry
 - Can there be a better testimony for our efforts to serve the Gospel than that of Demetrius
 - So many people were forsaking idols that the business of idol makers was suffering
 - It's hard to know how many people this represented, but considering the city was nearly half a million, the number of believers must have been significant
 - Demetrius' statement is also a reminder that the Gospel is by its nature a disruptive force
 - The truth comes to divide and interrupt the normal course of life
 - A course that leads to judgment and destruction
 - So if we desire to serve the Lord in meaningful ways for the purpose of building His kingdom, we should be prepared to cause a riot or two
 - If we don't, maybe we're not trying hard enough
- Demetrius ends his short speech by sanctimoniously appealing to a higher principle
 - He says if something isn't done, the temple of the beloved goddess Artemis will be regarded as worthless
 - After all, Diana is the goddess worshipped in all Asia and the world
 - That last statement is an exaggeration for effect
 - Diana was a popular idol, and evidence of Diana worship has been found in places as far away as Spain and France
 - But it's an overstatement to say she was worshipped in all the world
 - Nevertheless, Demetrius' tactic is obvious enough
 - He hopes to incite religious fervor as a result of his appeal
 - Yet his true cause is the economic concerns of losing business
 - Notice he says that their trade might fall into disrepute

- The word for disrepute comes from two Greek words that literally mean to be subjected to exposure
- He is literally saying that their trade of making false idols might be exposed for what it is...merely silver trinkets
- It's also important to understand that Ephesus was experiencing a period of economic decline in the latter half of the first century
 - And when economic conditions deteriorate, everyone looks for scapegoat
 - Hitler successfully redirected German discontent following the first World War against the Jewish population
 - Here we see a similar tactic taking place
 - Demetrius is redirecting the general economic decline in Ephesus against the Jews, which in this case they assumed to be the ones associated with Christianity
 - So Demetrius is laying their economic troubles at the feet of Christianity
- Demetrius' speech to the guild had the intended effect
 - He was throwing red meat to a bunch of blue collar guys who probably were easily agitated, especially by the rhetoric of their guild leader

[Acts 19:28](#) ¶ When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

[Acts 19:29](#) 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.

[Acts 19:30](#) And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

[Acts 19:31](#) Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

- In response to what they heard, the guild members get angry and begin to chant a popular rally cry
 - They chant Great is Artemis of the Ephesians

- There have been archeological discoveries that bear inscriptions with this phrase, so it must have been a popular phrase in the day
 - The men chant it with zeal here, and the excitement spills out of the guild and begins to move rapidly through the city
 - Of course, when you have something this disorganized and built on emotion moving through a large city, the sense of it is lost almost immediately
 - And so we see in v.29 that the city is filled with confusion
 - I have to wonder at this point if the guild leader himself is taken aback by how big this gets
- Because the crowd grows quickly with chanters and lookers on, the crowd instinctively moves toward a larger venue: the city theater
 - The text says they rushed...this is a mob gaining size and a sense of urgency quickly
 - The ancient Ephesus theater has been excavated and we know it to be another impressive Ephesus structure
 - It held 25,000 people in 66 semi-circular rows, and it's now filling up
 - So we have a very large, very angry crowd looking for blood and ready to use mob violence to right the perceived wrong
 - Into this den of iniquity, the crowd drags two men known to associate with Paul
 - They grab Gaius and Aristarchus
 - These companions of Paul are mentioned at different places in Paul's letters
 - They are in mortal danger in this situation
 - With so many angry people and so much opposition to the Jewish people, these men could be killed in a matter of minutes if the crowd descended upon them
- Eventually, Paul hears of the disturbance and tries to go into the theater to address the crowd

- Knowing Paul, he probably wanted to come to the rescue of his friends
 - And he probably couldn't resist the opportunity to preach to 25,000 Gentiles assembled in a theater
- Fortunately, some of Paul's disciples in Ephesus restrain Paul from making his way to the theater
 - This should tell us something about the seriousness of the situation
 - First, the text in Greek makes clear that Paul was pressing to go and the disciples were physically restraining him
 - Secondly, the fact that Paul's own disciples would act to hold him back in this way indicates how certain they were that Paul would have been killed had he entered that assembly
 - This was mob violence and the level of danger was extreme
- Finally, we hear that some Asiarchs repeatedly urged Paul not to enter the theater
 - These men were considered the elder statesmen of the province and of the religious life of the city
 - They were like ambassadors of the city and worked to protect the name and reputation of the city
 - Along the way, they had made friends with Paul and now they acted to protect him
 - We can safely assume that their motivation was as much an issue of maintaining civic reputation as it was assisting Paul himself
 - Look at how big this incident is becoming in a matter of hours
 - These civic leaders aren't even at the scene themselves
 - They send word to Paul not to enter the theater
 - Apparently they have heard of the commotion and that Paul was intending to enter the theater
 - And they had time and interest to send their instructions to Paul

- This is quite an incident
 - The very fact that Luke chose to highlight it among the three years Paul spent in the city is also an indication of how big a deal this has become
- What might happen if we preach the Gospel or serve in another capacity with consistency and passion and seriousness?
 - In Paul's case it mean he converted many in Asia Minor
 - He turned many against idol worship
 - He threatened the livelihood of an entire industry
 - And of course, Paul didn't achieve these things, but God did through Paul, yet the point remains the same
 - We can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us, but notice Christ strengthens...He doesn't do it for us so to speak
 - But let's not forget that when we work for the Kingdom, we are also opposing the enemy
 - And this world is his for a time
 - And until that time is up, we must acknowledge the enemy's power and his determination to frustrate God's work and God's workers
 - To the degree we are successful in ministry, we will see increasing waves of persecution, trial and testing
 - Based on missionary organization statistics, 80% of believers globally who practice their faith live in an environment of persecution
 - When Christians are obedient to the calling to be bold and faithful witnesses, they will experience persecution
 - For example, China prohibited Easter services this past week for any church that publicized their intent to hold services
 - They placed all church leaders under house arrest
 - In fact, the litmus test for selecting church leadership in China is not spiritual gifting, talent, nor education, but whether they having experienced persecution for their witness

- It's been said that in our country today, it's acceptable to send our children to die for our country, but we hesitate to send our children to countries where they might die for their Christian witness
- It's been said that if your local body of believers hasn't had anyone in the previous 12 months
 - Refused for promotion
 - Fired from their job
 - Corrected by an authority
 - Or harassed by a co-worker for talking about Jesus
- Then your church is serving the American Dream, rather than Jesus the Messiah
- Paul was serving the Lord, and it has brought him to this point, where either his friends or he himself might die this day for daring to preach the Gospel
- Now we have a theater filled with angry artisans but no clear leader and no clear target for their anger
 - And then a possible target emerges

[Acts 19:32](#) 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.

[Acts 19:33](#) 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.

[Acts 19:34](#) 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!"

- It's almost a comical scene at this point
 - The whole purpose for the gathering has become lost in the hubub
 - People are shouting at one another and saying different things
 - We can easily imagine the scene and understand how it would break down like this

- As the scene deteriorates, somehow some in the crowd came to think that their anger was focused at Alexander
 - He was a Jew in Ephesus and he wasn't a believer
 - And as he senses he might become a victim in all this, he motions to speak in his defense
 - Before he can even speak, however, the crowd recognized he was a Jew
 - And that precipitated a new round of Great is Artemis of the Ephesians lasting for two hours
- The reason they shouted Alexander down was because they saw any Jew as part of the problem
 - Remember Jews did participate in idol worship either, through they didn't work to convince Gentiles to follow suit
 - Nevertheless, the Gentile world made little distinction between the Jew and the emerging Christian faith or the Way
- Had Alexander had the chance to speak, we can image he would have tried to make that distinction if he was able
 - In fact, we can assume he would have tried to implicate Paul as the real villain
 - We can assume this because it's clear Alexander was an enemy of the faith
 - Paul himself indicts Alexander in 2Tim 4

[2Tim. 4:14](#) Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

[2Tim. 4:15](#) Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.

- The shouting of the chant went on for what must have seemed like forever
 - When a city official arrives to take charge

[Acts 19:35](#) After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, "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?"

[Acts 19:36](#) "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.

[Acts 19:37](#) "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

[Acts 19:38](#) "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.

[Acts 19:39](#) "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.

[Acts 19:40](#) "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."

[Acts 19:41](#) After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

- A town clerk arrives to take charge
 - It's likely at this point the assembling had begun to worry the city officials, since it was unclear what the cause was and where it was headed
 - So this town clerk is sent
 - The title sounds like a low level bureaucrat to our ears
 - But in reality it was the chief officer of the city
 - He was the mayor, the comptroller, the librarian, city administrator, and leader of the city council all in one
 - He was elected and he would have been the city's ambassador to the Roman authorities as well
 - Literally, the most important man in the city has arrived to end this controlled riot
 - When he takes the stage, the crowd quiets in respect for his position
 - He shows his skill as a politician in how he takes charge
 - He begins by soothing their religious concerns
 - He argues that surely everyone knows and respects the city and it's role in guarding the temple to the goddess Diana

- The temple was probably the largest Greek temple ever constructed
 - It could hold 50,000 people inside it's walls
 - The goddess Diana was portrayed as a woman with many breasts
- Her image originated with a meteorite that landed nearby and was thought to resemble a multi-breasted woman
 - I'm guessing the meteorite was found by a man
- This meteorite was quite large and it was the prominent feature in the middle of the temple itself
 - That's why the town clerk mentions the image that fell from heaven
 - He's referring to the meteorite
- The temple in Paul's day was actually the second temple to Diana
 - The first had been built 600 years earlier, but it was destroyed on the same day that Alexander the Great was born, October 13, 356BC
 - Later, the temple was rebuilt and the new structure was one of the seven wonders of the world
- The mayor then advises the men that since the world's respect for Diana and Ephesus was in no danger of disappearing, they should do nothing rash
 - Specifically, the men they grabbed and brought to the theater had neither spoken against the goddess herself nor had they robbed the temple
 - Remember the temple was also a bank, so it's importance was as much financial as it was religious
 - In fact, the religious activity was merely pretense to generate the commerce
 - So there was no proof that they were acting to tear down Diana and the activities at the temple, the mayor says let it go
 - But if there is a complaint to be made against them, go to court

- Press charges and do it in the right way
 - And then he adds a veiled threat: disband or be at risk of charges of disorderly conduct
 - And with that the mayor successfully ends the meeting and the threat against Paul and his companions
- What do we learn about this odd experience?
 - Well, among other things perhaps, we see the truth of Paul's teaching concerning our actions in bringing the Gospel in society

[Rom. 13:1](#) ¶ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

[Rom. 13:2](#) Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

[Rom. 13:3](#) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

[Rom. 13:4](#) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- Paul himself wrote those words, and he wrote them during the years he ministered in and around Ephesus
 - It's likely Paul thought back to this moment, when a city official came to his aid, though not for reasons of faith
 - But as Paul says in Rom 13, this official was acting in the interests of justice and did so because these men had a good testimony
 - Had Paul's companions resisted or fought back, the this official might have had a different decision
 - Secondly, Paul recognized the hand of God in this circumstance
 - Persecution eventually broke out throughout the Roman empire against Christians, but these things are all under God's authority
 - When government comes to our aid, it is a sign of God's protection
 - When it becomes an instrument of the enemy, it is a sign of God's willingness to test the church in trials

- Either way, we resist God when we resist the authorities over us
 - Finally, remember the eventual fate of Ephesus

[Rev. 2:1](#) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

[Rev. 2:2](#) "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

[Rev. 2:3](#) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

[Rev. 2:4](#) "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

[Rev. 2:5](#) "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

- Ephesus was known as a church that resisted false teachers and false teaching
 - Probably because of Paul's long time spent teaching the church and giving them a strong foundation
 - And they have perseverance and endurance, probably in the face of the city's never ending debauchery
 - But they lose their first love
 - And this can only mean they lose a focus on knowing and serving Christ
 - The church becomes something else, probably focused on it's own existence as an organization
 - Given how much the city prided itself in its structures and commerce, the church might have been tempted to see themselves in a similar way
 - Our churches today are threatened with the same sin and therefore with the same outcome
 - The church in Ephesus ceased to exist at a later point once the city lost it's harbor and temple and commerce dried up