

The Supremacy of Christ in Ephesus

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[0 : 00] That's Acts chapter 19. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

They answered, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. So Paul asked, Then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism, they replied.

Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months. Paul was a priest, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. And some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way.

[1 : 05] So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were deeply possessed. They would say, in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.

The seven sons of Sceva, the Jewish high priests, were doing this. One day, the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, and who are you?

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on and overpowered Paul. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and fleeing. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear.

[2 : 15] The name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 brothels. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

After all this happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. After I have been there, he said, I must visit Rome also.

He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. About that same time, there arose a great disturbance about the way.

A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines to Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said, Men, you know we receive a good income from this business.

[3 : 24] 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 man-made gods 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 wasn't enough for him. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed just one path into the theater. 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 theater.

The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. Jews pushed Alexandra to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to her.

[4 : 35] A motion 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!

The city clerk quieted the crowd and said, Men of Ephesus! Doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and upper image, which fell from heaven?

Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet, not to do anything rash. You brought these men here, though they've neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there's anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in the legal assembly.

As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion since there is no reason for it.

[5 : 38] After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. It's the passage that Daniel read for us, Acts chapter 19, on page 1115. We're continuing to look at God's unstoppable mission, continuing to look at Paul's missionary journeys, and here I want us to see the supremacy of Christ in the city of Ephesus.

What we've seen as Paul has been traveling around is that he is on a mission to declare to the world that Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord.

And so he's continuing his ministry. He's been moving around different important cities within the Roman Empire, cities that are full of many different gods, many different shrines, many different religions all mixed together, and cities where the cult of the emperor was also becoming increasingly significant.

And for us, I think, as we increasingly, I guess, moved to a pre-Christian or post-Christian, they're pre-Christian, we're post-Christian society, it's great for us to be reminded of the supremacy of King Jesus and that we wouldn't be dispirited, we wouldn't be discouraged, we'd remember Jesus is on the throne, he's still building his church.

And so what I want us to see tonight in Ephesus is some of the unique features that Dr. Luke brings out when Paul visits Ephesus, to see how Jesus continues to build his church, to see some of the different backgrounds that people are called into the church from.

[7 : 21] And I also hope that we'll have a few minutes to pray for similar groups in our own day. So we'll kind of explore what's been happening and then I hope we'll have a few minutes to pray at the end.

So first, a unique feature when Paul arrives in Ephesus are these baptisms. In the first seven verses, we discover Paul meeting with 12 disciples.

They're called disciples, although as Paul begins to ask them questions, we discover that there are certain vital truths that are missing. They're not yet Christians, they're sympathetic, they're open to God's word, they're listening to the truth, but they're needing more truth and especially they need to understand that Jesus is the center of the Christian faith.

And I think we can say that they're not yet Christians because in verse two, Paul asks them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they answered, no. We've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

Most likely they haven't heard about either the Great Commission when Jesus told the disciples to go into all the world and to baptize people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.

[8 : 39] And they certainly haven't heard of Pentecost in Acts chapter two, when the Spirit comes on the church as promised. It's promised. And after Pentecost, it's interesting, as Peter preaches that first sermon, I guess, of the church, his message is, here is Jesus.

Here is Jesus as prophesied and predicted in the Old Testament. Here is the suffering, the death and resurrection of Jesus. And the people say, what do we need to do? And there is that call to repent from sin, to believe in Jesus.

And they're told they'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that's what happens in Acts chapter two to the disciples, to the first church.

And we'll see it happening to these guys as well. But they don't have the Holy Spirit. And also, in verse three, they're not baptized into the name of Jesus. Paul asked them, then what baptism did you receive?

John's baptism, they replied. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him. John and his ministry was preparing the way.

[9 : 46] But it's Jesus who brings the kingdom, Paul is explaining. And so everybody needs to be in him. And so as Paul clarifies to these 12 disciples, the central place of the Lord Jesus, what happens next is that they are baptized, verse five, into the name of the Lord Jesus.

That's unusual. They're re-baptized because their first baptism wasn't into the name of the Lord Jesus. And then we see they have the same experience that the disciples had at Pentecost. In Acts chapter two, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and they prophesied. Just like when Jesus sent the Spirit first of all, and people are able to proclaim in lots of different languages the message of Jesus as Savior.

And so now they are Christians as they understand the central place of Jesus. Now why does this matter for us today? Well it matters because we want people within church, we want people who are sympathetic to God and to the good news to have clarity on the truth.

This story reminds us that knowing certain things about Christian faith, certain things about God is not enough. People need to know Jesus.

[11 : 10] They need to know Jesus as Lord, Jesus as Savior. We can think about it this way, with our cars.

We have cars and we have sat-nav. Our sat-nav is only as good as the mapping systems that we have downloaded onto our GPS device.

So if our maps are out of date or if our maps are incomplete, we will find ourselves perhaps going off course, we will find ourselves perhaps unable to get to our desired destination.

And what Paul reveals to these guys is that it's the same for the truth about the way of salvation. We need to be clear that it's through faith within the Lord Jesus that a person is saved.

Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. The church is built on his truth, who he is as the Son of God and the Son of Man who comes to be the suffering servant, living for us and then dying for our sin and rising for our salvation.

[12 : 15] That he comes as the Lamb of God, that once-for-all sacrifice to atone for our sin. The only way for us to have peace with God is through Jesus.

And so it was really important for Paul to share that. And so it's really important for us and one of the ways that we can share our faith is by doing that in church. We live in a place and we have a location in our city where there's quite often people coming and going in our church for different reasons and we never know what brings a person in.

Some people are here on holiday. Some people are looking for a new church. Some people are maybe sad, maybe anxious, maybe troubled coming into church and we need to be able to talk to, welcome new people and to be able to talk to them to find out what they know so that we might be able to share the truth with them.

So one of the groups that we'll pray for is we'll pray for people who come to church but who aren't yet Christian. We know that we have some of them and the churches that we belong to if we're not from this church will have people like that.

The next unique thing about Paul's visit to Ephesus is this sort of surprising story in verses 13 to 17, the story of the beatings and I will get to that in a little minute.

[13 : 39] Verse 8, when Paul enters the synagogue, he speaks boldly there for three months arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Now we've seen this as we've looked at Paul's missionary journeys. His mission strategy is let me find this synagogue, let me find the place where the Jewish people are gathering so that I can tell them that the Messiah that they're looking for has come and his name is Jesus.

And so the Jews and the God feeders, they were hearing that message. So he does that for three months but then we discover as in other cities, some of the Jews become resistant, they become obstinate, they don't want to hear the message.

So Paul leaves and in verses 9 and 10 we discover that he takes his teaching, he takes his debating to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. So it seems like he hires this venue where for two years he can spend a significant amount of time every day.

Some of the scholars reckon he may be taught in two years for over two, maybe between two and three thousand hours showing Jesus is Lord and seeking to demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Lord, seeking to speak about the historical realities of Jesus in the world that he is God's promised saviour.

[15:04] So that many in the province are hearing the word of the Lord, we're told in verse 10. And then again, as we often see, we see it in the life of Jesus, we see it with the apostles, verse 11 and 12, God brings word and miracle together.

So Paul is preaching with power and then we also get these miracles that are happening. It seems like these handkerchiefs, perhaps the sweat rags for his job as a tent maker, perhaps the apron of tent making, when he takes them off for the day, they're carried around town and people that touch them are being cured of illness.

Here is God's way of saying to the people, you need to listen to this man and his message. It's a message of power and authority that comes from God himself.

But we've seen that in other cities, but what we haven't seen is this story in verse 13 to 17. It's very unusual. It's very dramatic. It strikes us perhaps as mildly amusing, but it's certainly a very striking public show of the power of Jesus, a way of validating the supremacy of Jesus and the authority of Paul as a messenger.

So what happens is there's a group of these seven sons of Sceva who seems like they want to make a name for themselves as those who can drive out evil spirits.

[16:33] They recognize the power of Paul's ministry and they think, I want some of that action. And so they try and cast out a demon in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches.

F.F. Bruce, a Bible scholar, says, like a weapon wrongly handled, this exploded in their hands. We have in verse 15 evil spirits. Jesus, I know, I know about Paul, I know his power and authority. Who are you? And he overpowers and gives them a beating.

What's happening here is they're trying to claim the power of Jesus without knowing Jesus. They're trying to act as if they're in Jesus' team but they're not coming in his name.

And so God acts for the glory of Jesus through this beating because what happens in verse 17?

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour.

[17:42] God uses this moment to further display the majesty of Jesus as Lord. So we've got some people trying to exploit the power of Jesus and they are exposed so that the true messenger and the true power of Jesus is revealed.

We hear about this in the news from time to time. In the news this week, the people that were crowdfunding to apparently help homelessness but they were pocketing somewhere in the region of £300,000 for themselves, it seems like these sons of Sceva are trying to exploit the name of Jesus in order to further their own career and to pursue their own glory.

Claiming the name of Jesus but not being with Jesus, not knowing Jesus, personally submitting to him as Lord, we discover here it is a dangerous thing.

There is a warning here, I think. There is a warning about ministries and churches which claim to be Christian but don't know or represent Jesus.

Places that call themselves Christian churches but they don't believe the Bible. They don't believe Jesus is the Son of God. They don't believe that he died for sin or that he truly rose from the dead for salvation.

[19:09] We see in this part of town a lot of Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses. Again, claiming to be Christian but with a very different message about Jesus, not representing Jesus as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

And so one of the groups that we will pray for are to pray for churches in our city, in our cities that are not true churches, to pray for those who are caught up in cults, for their true conversion, and so that these places would become true places of worship where the gospel is shared, and we'll also

pray against their influence so that people will see the truth.

Because it's so harmful when somebody is looking for spiritual reality to go to a place that's not presenting it, when they're not presenting Jesus.

after the beatings, another unique thing happens, we see this great bonfire take place, verses 18 to 20.

One of the things that becomes clear about Ephesus, which is true of a lot of Roman cities, is it's a place where idols and statues and pagan religion was everywhere.

[20 : 30] If you wanted to go to the butchers to get your meat, the meat that you'd be buying, we'd most likely have been sacrificed at a temple to one of the pagan gods and then sold on. In Ephesus, if you wanted a doctor or a hospital, the only place that you could go was to the doctors who were connected to the pagan god of health, Asclepius.

So everything about life was connected to pagan religion. Trade and tourism in Ephesus was all centred on the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

So here is a city that's dominated by other religions and alternative world views. Now let's see what happens.

Verse 18, many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. So you've got pagan religion, but you've also got another group and they're practicing sorcery, this dark magic attached to evil powers.

[21 : 47] Practicing it for themselves or for others in order to bring health or safety or wealth. people. But then, as they hear the gospel, the good news of Jesus, and as they believe, they're confessing and they're also confessing very publicly that they are going to be trusting Jesus with their lives.

And they do that with this great big public bonfire. Here is their way of saying, I'm breaking with this old way of life. I'm living a new life for Jesus. I trust that his power is greater than that dark power. I no longer want anything to do with that. So here is a group of people in the middle of a very pagan city and they're making a very radical change and only the superior power of Jesus explains this kind of switch.

They're hearing the gospel. They're hearing Paul. day after day teaching and debating and discussing. They're hearing the gospel.

They're understanding who God is. They grew up perhaps in a city that had lots of little gods and Paul is telling them there's only one true God and he's the creator of us all and we're all accountable to him.

[23 : 14] And that God is both good and loving but he's also holy and just. And Paul would have been speaking to them not just about who God is but also about who they were as people.

Made in the image of God with value and dignity. Made to know and enjoy God. Made to be worshippers of God. Made to love God and to love one another.

Presenting the idea of this is how we are made to live. But no doubt Paul would have spoken to them about how we actually live. He would have spoken to them about the reality of sin.

That they have failed to worship. That they had failed to love God and to love others. That instead they were being held in slavery to false gods and slavery to sin leading to death.

But we know that he also came proclaiming Jesus as the good news. The saviour that we all need.

[24 : 23] That whereas we are unable to meet God's perfect standards there is one who did. Jesus, God's son. He lived a life of perfect obedience.

Lived a life of perfect love towards God and towards other people. And he came to be a substitute both in his perfect life satisfying God's law that we break and we cannot fulfill but also satisfying the justice of God against God's broken law.

Jesus comes to be the sacrifice paying the price for our sin. In order that through faith in him we might be forgiven. That if we respond in faith and believe to Jesus instead of receiving hell and judgment as we deserve we can receive heaven and eternal life with him as a great gift of God's grace.

And as Paul preached that message there were people who were coming to faith and they were turning their life around and that's still the gospel message today.

That's still the invitation to respond and to turn. And we know that God is still rescuing people from various backgrounds and bringing them into his kingdom.

[25 : 44] This week I was reading the magazine of the Open Doors organization. They serve the persecuted church around the world and they were telling the story of a pastor by the name of David in Syria.

And Pastor David was converted from a branch of Islam called Druze Islam. A mixture of Islam and various eastern religious ideas like reincarnation.

There's about 600,000 of them in Syria. Well he became a follower of Jesus and he became a Christian and he began pastoring a church in a war zone and he said that last month he baptized 16 new Christians, all converts from this Druze Islam.

And over the last number of years there's been hundreds who've been turning from that way of life to faith in the Lord Jesus. Jesus is still building his church in hard places. Jesus is still moving people from spiritual darkness into the kingdom of light.

Just remind us that Jesus is supreme and we get our confidence as we pray. So we'll pray for those in our cities who are in the grip of new age spirituality, for those who are desperate for spiritual meaning but don't know where to turn.

[27 : 00] We'll pray for those of other faiths. We'll pray for those we know who are sharing Jesus across cultures and across different faith backgrounds. The last unique thing that we see in Ephesus is the response of these businessmen.

It's an interesting response led by Demetrius. Verse 23, we read about that time there arose a great disturbance about the way. Time and again as Paul preaches, he meets those who believe, some instantly, some over time but we also see time and again that the way of Jesus provokes opposition and hostility.

And here in Ephesus, the scene is set for a power contest between Jesus and the great goddess Artemis or Diana.

And what's happening here is that God is clearly working to show that Jesus is the greater power, authority and glory, much greater than their man-made religion.

Let's hear Demetrius. Demetrius in verse 24 is a silversmith. His job is to make shrines of Artemis and he's obviously doing quite well financially.

[28 : 21] He calls the other businessmen together, the workmen and related trades and said, men, you know 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 practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. Paul has been exposing the folly of idolatry and many are being persuaded.

Demetrius is not happy. not happy. Verse 27, there's 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 towards the end of verse 27 she'll be robbed of her divine majesty.

So see, Jesus as Lord is discrediting Artemis. people are comparing the two and they're recognizing that Jesus is greater.

Perhaps Paul was talking about Jesus as the true temple, the true meeting place. You want to know God? Don't go to the temple of Artemis. Come to King Jesus. And of course, while Demetrius thinks that Artemis is being robbed of her divine majesty, that's not what's happening at all.

[29 : 47] It's that Jesus is receiving the glory that's always due him because he's the only God. He's the only Lord. But as we've seen in other places, mob mentality kicks in.

Verse 28, the crowds became furious and began shouting, great as Artemis of the Ephesians. We see it in verse 34, again shouting in unison for about two hours, great as Artemis of the Ephesians. We're like with a sad picture of angry people trying to uphold the honour of their so-called God, the God who could do nothing to defend herself because she is no God at all, as Paul had been saying to them.

Clearly part of Paul's mission strategy was to expose the idols of the day, to show the weakness of false religion compared to the reality of knowing Jesus as God and as saviour.

It's important for us to be able to recognise that though we don't have shrines and though we don't have idols in our culture, there are still things that we live for, there are still things that we would consider of ultimate value in our lives, there are things that people could not imagine living without

and it's our job as Christians to seek to show people that Jesus is greater, to show people that those longings that they have, the hopes that they place in a relationship or a career ultimately will only be met through faith in Jesus because when people follow a God that they can put in their pocket or when people follow a God who can fail, one who can be lost, our God is too small and so we present people with supremacy of Jesus.

[31 : 47] We also see from the mission of Paul that it's really important to resist the spirit of the age and they would say to us that all beliefs are equally valid, that all roads ultimately lead to God.

We hear it a lot and it can seem rude or intolerant to have an alternative but we discover from the ministry of Paul, we discovered it from Jesus this morning, who and what we believe in is of crucial importance, that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life and so we are compelled to invite people to believe in Jesus.

But one of the things that we'll pray about in just a couple of minutes is we'll pray for places where Christianity finds itself under a tank, where there are those in power who would seek to discredit the good name of Jesus and the church of Jesus.

But as we have looked very briefly at Paul in Ephesus, again we have reason as Christians to take heart. We have reason as Christians to worship God for the way that we see him build his church in a hard situation.

We have called to pray as we look around and we see that we live in the same kind of setting and we too are called to speak, to speak for Jesus as Lord and to work with him as he works in our city and our communities to bring people to himself, to bring glory to himself.