

This Mission May Be Threatening; Christianity as a Potential Threat

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts chapter 19.

If you're visiting with us, you can pull out that black Bible in the chair in front of you and go to page 109 towards the back, page 109, and you'll find Acts 19.

And verse 21 through 41 we'll look at this morning. If I pass out, Lord is just going to pick up where I left off, so you don't have to worry about anything.

The manuscript's right here. Don't go outside the manuscript now. Be a good boy. Thanks for praying for us and my family.

Acts 19, 21-41 Excuse my snottyness and everything.

[1:11] Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed to Macedonia and Achaia saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Having sent to Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus. He himself stayed in Asia for a while. And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the way.

For a certain 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 similarity and said, Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

And 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.

But 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, that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence.

[2:26] And when they heard this and were filled with rage, they cried out, saying, Great is Artemis to the Ephesians. The city was filled with confusion.

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.

And 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.

The assembly was in confusion. And the majority did not even know for what cause he had come together. Some of the crowd concluded, It was Alexander since the Jews had put him forward.

And having motion with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, an outcry arose from them all as he shouted for about two hours, Great is Artemis to the Ephesians.

[3:31] And after quieting the multitude, the town clerk said, Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all, who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of that which fell down from heaven?

Since then, these are undeniable facts. We ought to keep calm, and to do nothing rash. We have brought these men, who are neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of our gods.

So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him, have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session, and pro-councils are available. Let them be charges against one another.

But if you want anything beyond this, we shall be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed, we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's affair, since there is no cause.

In this connection, we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering. And after saying this, he dismissed the assembly. A quote, The church in America is slowly awakening from the distortion of 350 years of dominance and prosperity.

[4:49] End quote. John Piper said that. John Piper and David Mathis just put out a book called, Think It Not Strange, Navigating Trials in the New America.

They say this, The days of gospel persecution in the United States no longer just hang on the distant horizon. They are already here.

At least for some. It's beginning with the bakers, the florists, and photographers. Before long, the consensus may be that faithful biblical exposition is quote-unquote hate speech.

However, Christians should not panic, they continue. For 2,000 years, this has been what it has meant to identify with Christ in the world. The normal experience of those who follow a man who was crucified.

Suffering for the gospel was not just tolerated in the early church, it was expected. Peter learned the lesson in Acts 4, and again in Acts 5.

[6:02] Then Stephen was stoned in Acts 7, after Acts 3. Only three of the books remaining 25 chapters have no mention of persecution. It's almost like every week as we're going through the book of Acts, I keep mentioning opposition, opposition, opposition, opposition.

Because the gospel brings opposition. In a blog, they say this, in an introduction to the book, for many of us who are slowly awakening from the dream world of American cultural Christianity, God's word fills us with a longing not to be domesticated, comfort-seeking, entertainment-addicted, prosperity-loving, security-craving, approval-desiring Christians.

We don't want to be that. It's abominable to us to be that. We don't want to waste our lives just fitting in.

Do you long for not fitting in? It's hard. It's hard when you face opposition to the gospel. It's hard when somebody calls you a blank, blank, blank nutcase.

It's hard. Do you long to not be comfort-seeking? Do we long to not be prosperity-loving in the midst of a prosperity-loving America?

[7:36] I mean that's a part of our culture it's hard it's difficult that's why in Acts the motivation and the encouragement to us is just to do it just to be who we are let God use us to fulfill us let God use us to fulfill his mission and as we come to this portion in Acts but be prepared this mission may be threatening the mission that God has called us to may be threatening we have to be ready we have to be prepared as you know very well watching the news here and there we're already being the minority you're accused of bigotry you're accused of being prejudice you're accused of being narrow-minded and friends this is just the beginning if we are going to be used by God to proclaim this gospel if we're going to be used by God to fulfill his mission we have to be prepared this mission may be threatening here I'll put it in a statement we must realize that this mission

God uses us to fulfill may be a threat to the very fabric of our society because his gospel message radically revolutionizes people religiously economically socially civically so be prepared be alert when you're talking about the gospel when you speak about the truth of Jesus Christ that alters people in the way they spend their money their beliefs and practices their social life their very culture when the gospel is proclaimed and when people embrace Christ there are religious economic social and civil ramifications some of those are positive and some of those are negative the gospel poses itself as a threat to religious beliefs and practices as well as social economic and the civil life of the populace because we tell people this is what Jesus says if anyone wishes to come after me let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me let her deny herself take up her cross and follow me and then the thing that they'll come back with you is they'll say oh that's your interpretation what what it's not my interpretation you just read it for what it says it's that way they can pull out of that it's that way they can pull out of that truth and then they'll say you're a bigot and you're narrow-minded now listen be encouraged never underestimate the power of God in the gospel has the potential revolutionizing the life and culture of a city and the surrounding region it can affect beliefs practices social interaction and business so much be warned though your life may be threatened and as we think about us being proclaimers of God's truth not only are we hit with the reality that our lives may be threatened as we proclaim this gospel but then we also have the question for our own hearts has my life been revolutionized in what areas of my life does it need to change or have we settled for mediocrity have we settled for

I don't want the gospel to affect that area of my life I don't want the gospel to affect that part social media facebook I don't want it to affect that I don't want it to affect what I do with my wallet I don't want it to affect what I do with my time I don't want it to affect any of those things it's a challenge for us so let's start first in verse 21 how Paul resolved in the Holy Spirit it says purpose in the Holy Spirit some of your versions have a little S some have a big S it seems like it's talking about the Holy Spirit Paul purposed in the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he passed to Macedonia and Achaia and then he finally would go to Rome he wanted to return to establish those churches and strengthen the Christians going to Rome was a part of God's divine plan for him as we'll see later on in the book of Acts so Luke's kind of giving us a foretaste of what's going to happen in the future part of Acts what he's writing and the mob riot that's going to happen in this next section that's going to confirm it was time for Paul to move on so notice it says in 22 he sends

Timothy and Erastus to those who ministered and served him he sent them to Macedonia ahead and the question some people ask why Jerusalem possibly to deliver help from the Gentile Christians which he's spoken about in 2 Corinthians but Luke doesn't deal with those details Luke's preparing his readers what's going to come later on in Acts and Luke wants to show us the impact of Paul proclaiming the gospel and the impact of when we proclaim the gospel which moves us right into verse 23 which we see the first point Christianity as a potential threat verse 23 and about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the way it was a big deal the radical response of Christians in Ephesus remember how we looked at that last week it caused many of the people of Ephesus to become concerned about their trade for gods and goddesses Artemis in particular which we'll speak about her in a moment it was no small disturbance now it wasn't Paul per se him personally it was what he was proclaiming and really what happened to those that he proclaimed this message to it was transforming people religiously it was transforming people emotionally economically socially civically it was it was just changing the way they looked at life so Christianity can come across as a potential threat revolutionizing first number one economic status or your wallet 24 to 25 for a certain man named Demetrius he was a silversmith made silver shrines of Artemis he was bringing no little business to the craftsmanship in other words it was a lucrative business they would make these silver shrines small temple replicas of

[15 : 45] Artemis and given the fact it seems like he was a leader amongst the group of silversmiths he didn't want his means to some serious bank to all of a sudden blow away that's why he says in 25 he gathered together the workmen of similarities and then you know that our prosperity depends upon this business we're making some good money here guys Artemis who is she let me speak take a few moments to speak about her she was a major goddess in Ephesus she was the goddess of fertility the mistress of wild beasts a virgin who helped women in childbirth she was a huntress with bow and arrow you see pictures of her whatever statues with bow and arrow she was also known as the goddess of death they found idols and it shows a grotesque female figure which would be inappropriate for me to say in our mix gathering together here she received her name because she made the people

Artemis which means safe and sound Ephesus was the major site of worship of her in Asia minor all that surrounding area people took seriously the worshipping of their idols especially her so much so they had prostitutes around her temple one of the seven wonders of the ancient world had 60 foot pillars it was 425 feet by 225 feet larger than a football field the largest building in the Greek world one of the most widely followed cults in the Greco-Roman world they would actually have a week long festival in the spring in honor of Artemis also known as for the Romans as Diana so these shrines was their business and business was good so not only do the implications of true conversion affect the one converted it impacts those who depend on the sale of certain things for their own livelihood they wanted that money and they were losing business people were letting go of those idols and they liked the change coming into their pockets

Demetrius and his workman friends so he gathered them together and he gave his pep talk let me sum it up for you first important thing is our money second important thing Paul's vast influence that God's made by hands are fake third our civic pride our religious pride of Artemis the temple is going to become as nothing our trade is going to become in disrepute discredited she is deposed blah blah blah so notice to what did Demetrius first appeal their wallets Christianity had become a powerful threat to their business of making some good dough you know that our prosperity depends upon this business friends so first economic status or their wallets number two religious loyalty verse 26 and then into verse 27 and you see in here that not only in

Ephesus but almost in all of Asia this Paul is persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people saying that God's made with hands are no gods at all in verse 27 that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should be dethroned from her magnificence everybody worships Artemis so we can't let this happen so use loyalty to Artemis as a way to bully the Christians everybody believes this nobody believes what you believe that's a stupid foolish view the same thing happens to us today people bully Christians because the beliefs of Christians don't match up with their own beliefs that's flat out bigotry they accuse us of bigotry no this is the other way around because our beliefs don't match up with their own they just completely and totally disregard us and then they bully you you know it takes courage to stand up for the truth when the majority are against you

God gives us grace to do it that's how he can bring about a major transformation in people's lives he gives us grace to do that so you have their wallets economically number two religiously the gospel revolutionizes things and it comes across as a threat economically religiously number three socially social community verse 27 the first part and only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute in other words we are a connected community of tradesmen this is our social fabric this is us being together our trade will go away so business and social connection the truth of the gospel will touch the social life of people too who they hang out with who they're connected to what they put on social media the scary part is what some people will put on their facebook page the gospel is threatening because it can revolutionize what people spend it revolutionizes their beliefs and practices it revolutionizes their social connection and community and number four it revolutionizes their civil dignity also verse 27 actually religious loyalty and civil pride are mixed here together that the temple of great goddess

[22:59] Artemis be regarded as worthless that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should be dethroned from her magnificence the great temple of Artemis is here in our city this is our god she belongs to us she's going to be dethroned and she's pride to us as Ephesians notice when they start shouting they don't say greatest Artemis they say greatest Artemis of the Ephesians so there's religious loyalty and civil pride all of Asia the whole world worship worship sir we're known for this because it's our cultural identification friends Christianity would change people's culture to what to have a culture of Jesus Christ there is no American culture for us not culture of South

America or South Africa or Bulgaria or Russian no that's not our culture our culture is Jesus Christ the gospel is our culture so Christianity was not disturbing the peace but they thought it was this is unjust but realize the message of the gospel transforms people religiously socially economically and culturally the gospel brings ramifications to people and their beliefs social structure their wallets and civic life their culture and interesting too we learned this not from Paul we learned this from a non-believer so Demetrius saying this he didn't believe the gospel had no mind to do so either and we learned these principles from his perspective of what's happening to the people that live within his city we learned that converts go from being a friend of the world to a friend of God from loving the things of this world to loving

God God used Paul to proclaim he must turn from idols to serve the one and only true God and if you're here this morning you don't serve and worship the one true God this message is for you God should judge us we are sinners and yet he's gracious and compassionate and his arms are wide open that sinners would repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ alone who lived died and rose on behalf of sinners that's the gospel so Christianity can change potentially change the culture of a city because the whole fabric of a person's life is altered and revolutionized they buy they hang out with what they do with their time has the gospel affected us in that way has the gospel infected us in that way just get a breather okay so you have the gospel coming across

Christianity coming across as a potential threat revolutionizing these different areas of their life so what ends up being the negative result the negative result of the gospel is that we're the enemy the enemy because after his pep talk after he brings out his perspective of what he sees happening with the people in his own city he gathers around these tradesmen with himself starting in 28 they heard this and they were filled with anger and they cried out greatest Artemis to the Ephesians they're filled with anger and pride to defend their money I mean their lovely goddess and they had a procession that took place ending up in the theater notice they rushed with one according to the theater dragging along

Gaius and Aristarchus Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia the theater held 25,000 people we don't know if 25,000 people were there but it was a big theater they dragged Paul's working

partners with them notice in verse 30 Paul wanted to go into the assembly the disciples would not let him they didn't want him to do that good move guys he had to persuade him not to do that notice in 31 and also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his and to him repeatedly urged him not to venture to the theater Asiarchs were the civic rulers of Ephesus the leading men the upper class guys Paul had an influence even with these guys they were his friends and it doesn't say that they were believers it says that they were his friends and even they told him

[29:24] Paul don't go in there notice how the city was just filled with confusion what's going on the situation has become chaotic this was no town meeting it was a riot these guys got the whole city fired up look it shows how pervasive and successful gospel proclamation was so it's people were shouting one thing they're shouting another in verse 32 the assembly was in confusion the majority had no idea what so what are we here for I don't know hey alright they were going to hand off free hot dogs hey alright people were present with that no idea why they were there people were mixed up and confounded all these different views were being expressed and there was a huh and then you have here in verse 33 which is very obscure some of the crowd concluded it was

Alexander actually the word concluded means taught or instructed so it's kind of odd what is Luke trying to say here it seems like the idea is some instructed Alexander about what's going on and he goes forward in order to address the crowd it seems that Jews put him forward to give a defense in other words look this is a Christian thing is not a Jewish thing maybe that's what was going on so it's hard to tell whatever happened notice it says in verse 34 when they recognized he was a Jew an alkyl rose from them all as they shouted for two hours great as Artemis of the Ephesians they saw the Jews as part of the problem too so they didn't care for two hours can you imagine for two hours can you imagine this in our day and age of video footage I was just thinking about that this week you have the news coverage

CNN ABC News Fox News are all showing this for two hours what do you think there Billy well you know I've been here since 7 o'clock this morning it would be interesting to see how it would be portrayed on TV for two hours they're shouting this the appeal of emotion can be very powerful can it here is the reality the negative result of being a Christian is that people will think you're really weird you're a nutcase an enemy to be disposed are we ready for this are we prepared and equipped I'll admit to you when I get any type just a little bit of persecution I crumble get so discouraged and depressed maybe you're not like me maybe for you you're just like alright not me I don't feel that way I feel like an idiot I just want to go crawl under a table this is the reality Christianity can pose itself as a threat because it revolutionizes people's lives and the negative result of the gospel is that people think of us as enemies but look Christianity though or Christians we're not really a threat we're not and praise God for this town clerk praise God for the quote unquote town clerks of our day he was very wise steps in to quell the rioting mob pacifying the situation before they really started going crazy town clerk was the highest civic official operated like a city manager he was the city's liaison to the

Romans of Roman rule uninformed about Christianity but notice how God used him to stop the situation he reviewed their beliefs brought a proposition gave them evidence appealed to them then dismissed the crowd his speech was successfully brilliant notice how he begins quieting the multitude he 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 the image which fell down from heaven what's he saying everybody knows about Artemis everybody knows about her power her relationship to us in Ephesus so why are you getting all worked up notice he says in verse 36 so then since these are undeniable facts was he ignorant yes but notice how God used him to bring peace

[34:57] God used him to tell the people keep calm don't do anything you're going to regret chillax you ought to keep calm for verse 37 he brought these men who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess they're not temple robbers they're not blaspheming our goddess there's no no physical act has been done or committed in reference to a crime notice how those who love Artemis he persuaded them these guys haven't broke any laws he's going to say a couple verses but if we keep going we're going to be the ones breaking laws friend there's a lesson for us to learn here it's important for us not to make fun of other people's beliefs as a matter of fact we could or should take a little bit of time to understand their beliefs not so we can learn in the sense of oh maybe

Christianity and your beliefs coincide no but to show our care for them as a person and their right to hold those beliefs they have every right to believe that now are they wrong yes they are that's the rub is that we would say biblical Christianity is the only truth because Jesus says in the way of the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me we believe they're wrong and they are wrong but we also believe especially if we're Baptist Baptist you take the acrostic Baptist B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S the I stands for individual soul liberty what that means is we believe that someone of their own volition will embrace the gospel we don't make people do it we don't make people converts they choose to believe the gospel of their own volition and we could even state a case friends that the very fabric of our nation was founded based upon the principles that Baptists have believed historically for practically 500 years and we stand on the shoulders of our forefathers who wrote about liberty of conscience that people believe of their own volition and we persuade them it doesn't mean we don't try to persuade them we give them the gospel but we don't force anybody and they have every right to believe that friend it's vital for us to accurately represent what others believe that shows respect for people and the right they have to believe what they believe it may even give us a window to proclaim the truth does it mean that we just let them rant and rave and rant and rave and rant and rave

Daniel and I have experienced that Michael and I have you talk with people Jerome don't you blah blah blah blah blah you know you're like wow this is a long time you know talking about this you know we listen and it's exercising discernment yes I understand that but do we care about the person do we respect them as a person it gives us a principle to learn here well anyways going back to our text here in 38 if Demetrius and the craftsmen are with them they have to complain against any men in the courts are in session and pro councils are available to bring charges against one another that's what the courts are for they're in session bring the charges they can appeal to pro councils for justice they can settle the matters legally if you have a legal complaint that's what you're supposed to do and then he says 39 if you want anything beyond this it shall be settled in the lawful assembly look if you want something beyond this personal case then go to the regular assembly the judging assembly you must do this because of the risk of rioting for no legal cause which could prove to be detrimental to the whole city of Ephesus notice 40 we're in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's affairs there's no cause in this connection we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering they can bring charges against us this is a chaotic disturbing unjust public meeting that's not how you bring these charges against these guys men of Ephesus you do it in a lawful assembly if they've broken a law that's how you do it but if you keep going down this road they're not going to be the ones breaking the law we're going to be the ones breaking the law Paul will be in danger Aristarchus Gaius will be in danger we will they have not done anything but wish they could be charged with a particular crime the great part is proclaiming the gospel is free it's free there's no charge you have to worry about having to do something to do that no you just can proclaim the gospel you have the freedom to do that at least in this country so what is he saying here he's saying that if you guys keep going Rome could step in and limit our privileges even taking away their freedom as a city it will not be us who are the lawbreakers friends it will be our persecutors which is why it's so important

I think it's rather interesting in parentheses I'm saying this it will be it will be interesting for us because after we're done with acts we're going to start in first Peter being weirdos I think that's going to be the title of the book something like something like that John Piper I think they talked about that how we're weirdos in this society it's so vitally important for us to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord so that what happens is that we're not coming across as a lawbreakers our persecutors come across as a lawbreakers they're the ones that get accused not us 41 after saying this he dismissed the assembly this level headed ruler who saw the Christians were not breaking any laws or causing the disturbance dismissed the crowd go home go home or we'll face dire consequences let's sum it up the gospel can transform a culture of a community to such an extent that the community gets nervous and reacts to stop the transformation those who don't want to be changed will react with hostility toward those whose lifestyle has been altered and will necessarily like that but as followers of

[43:20] Jesus Christ we can simply allow our changed lifestyle to speak for itself as we speak with our lips the new life Jesus can bring as we do this we can trust God to protect us and give us the grace in the midst of opposition that's what we can do we still allow our changed lifestyle to speak as we speak the gospel and we just trust God to protect us what's the worst they can do kill us if they kill you you just go to be with the Lord Jesus Christ that's actually the best thing they can

do when you think about it so notice how this challenges us in our evangelism when you're doing evangelism this challenges us instead of merely inviting someone to church not to say that's a bad thing but we give them the gospel instead of a quick encounter take the time to relate to connect and be personally involved with somebody instead of using some emotional appeal you must come forward walk the aisle come on we disciple people to the truth sometimes

I've given the gospel once twice ten twenty fifty a hundred times and you teach them the gospel you teach them the truth no there needs to be a sustained gospel effort in the lives of people so they can hear truth and they can see it lived out before them we do this so they can see true biblical Christianity that's no threat it's no threat at all and realize we're becoming more and more of a threat to our society because we can revolutionize what people buy what people hang out with their practices their culture has the gospel made an impact upon us in this way do we want to see our lives turn upside down are we ready to follow hard after

Christ does his grace his compassion his kindness his mercy towards us does it motivate us and prompt us and encourage us in the way we live our lives that's the motivation his grace not because we have to but his grace his compassion his kindness and his love that's what motivates us let me end with this about 112 AD there was the governor of Bithynia Pontus his name was Pliny the Younger he wrote a letter to the emperor emperor Trajan he didn't know how to deal with Christians and there's much more I can give you but let me just read to you what he wrote about them what Pliny said about them they pledged not to commit any crime such as fraud theft adultery but they threatened the endurance of temple and religious festivals because the temple and religious festivals were being deserted interesting the perspective of the unsaved of the way we live our lives it can come across as a threat but there's really no threat father give us grace as a people have been changed what we buy what we say what we do our social interactions practices our culture as we see how much you love us in Jesus Christ keep transforming us we pray and also father use us realizing that we may come across as a threat but help us to just trust that you will protect us and we'll just live holy lives and we'll speak this gospel good news even though they'll think we're weirdos continue to take a few moments of silence to ponder what we've seen in God's word after a few moments we'll do our time of giving we'll sing our last two songs closing prayer such sounds what we'll hear and we'll move actually we'll see you there's a■■■■