

A gospel riot

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[0 : 00] If you're looking at a holiday, you'd probably like to look up different places and what you can expect to look forward to about the holiday.

! So today we're looking at Ephesus. Let's not think about what you might look forward to about Ephesus today, but let's travel back in time to about 54 AD and see what we're looking at.

Looking forward to if we were to visit this city. I think this would be the sort of front cover of the holiday brochure for Ephesus.

On the front cover, this temple, this temple of Artemis, a goddess. This would be front and center on the brochure.

We mentioned this temple briefly last week. But it's pretty spectacular. Apparently it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient worlds.

[1 : 08] People flocked from all over the place to see this temple and to worship the goddess Artemis. One person was recorded saying of it.

Perhaps this quote would be in the holiday brochure if you're booking a holiday to Ephesus in 54 AD. When I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy.

And I said, lo, apart from Olympus, the sun has never looked on a sight so grand. This is a grand temple.

This temple for Artemis. And who is Artemis? And who is Artemis? Well, she was pretty legendary. She was the daughter of the god Zeus.

You've probably heard of him. She was known for giving people health and help. She was a virgin who apparently could help women in childbirth.

[2 : 09] She was a hunter with a bow who helped people when they were hunting. And she helped people who were dying. And she was a goddess who received great worship.

But we find ourselves visiting Ephesus again this morning because we're following Paul. Paul, he's at the beginning of his third missionary journey, his third and final missionary journey in the book of Acts, is going to take him all the way to the end of this book, to Rome.

And he arrived in Ephesus. And as we saw last week, he made a great impact. Paul came and he preached about another god. Not that goddess Artemis, but another god, the god of the Bible.

Three in one, father, son, and spirit. He spoke particularly about the son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has come to save his people from their sins.

And his preaching was accompanied by extraordinary signs. Do you remember the handkerchiefs and the aprons? God did extraordinary miracles through the apostle Paul.

[3 : 34] We saw it was very much God at work in this city. And that led people to the Lord Jesus Christ. To reject their old ways, which included burning some of their magical books.

And they came to see that the God of the Bible. He is the great God above all gods to be worshipped. They now knew Jesus as their rightful Lord and saviour, the king of their lives.

And so other powers and other gods don't hold a place in their lives anymore. And that's what happens when people come to love the Lord Jesus and make him Lord of their lives.

It changes things. It changes things for them. And as we see, it changes things for the culture around them. So as we head back to Ephesus, we're heading into the marketplace, first of all.

We're going to see what impact it had on the marketplace. People turning to Jesus as saviour and Lord. Have a look at verse 23. About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way.

[5 : 03] Let's just pause there a minute. Those words, great disturbance, that's a bit of an understatement. Perhaps a bit like this photo.

Looks like it rained a bit last night. That's a bit of an understatement. British people, I think, are particularly good at understatements. The word disturbance there, better words would be commotion or turmoil or causing a huge stir.

A great commotion had happened about the way. That's Jesus. Why does it cause such a great commotion? Well, it's about the impact on the marketplace.

Verse 24. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

So Demetrius, he works the market. He sells his shrines to Artemis. That's probably him building little temples out of silver, models of the temple.

[6 : 12] That great temple in Ephesus. And he gathers himself and fellow traders together in the marketplace for some crisis talks.

Because his business is under threat. And it's all because of Paul and his ministry. Let's read on.

Verse 25. He called them together for these crisis talks, along with the workers in related trades, and said, you know, my friends, that 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 in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. Paul and his ministry is a threat to the business on the marketplace.

Because Paul is saying, don't worship other gods. Don't worship gods made by human hands. For poor Demetrius, that's what his business depends on.

[7 : 24] He says we're being robbed by this gods. And not only that, but poor Artemis is being robbed as well. Do you see that?

Verse 27. There is danger. Not only of our trade losing 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. They're being robbed of their business.

Artemis is being robbed of her divine majesty. But if Artemis is so great, surely they don't really have anything to worry about. Do you see what Demetrius seems to care about most here?

I think as we read those verses, he cares most about his wallet. He cares most about his business. Money in his pocket. With all these people turning to another god, who doesn't allow the worship of created things, how is this man going to survive?

[8 : 42] And then he gives a little bit of thought to Artemis. Poor, poor old Artemis. But really, it's his business.

And I think that is Demetrius' God. Tim Keller, the late pastor, theologian, wrote a book about counterfeit gods.

And in it, he says this. What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than gods. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than gods.

Anything you seek to give you, what only gods can give you. Essentially, it's whatever you look to as the lord of your life.

Many in Ephesus have made this great turning to Jesus and made him lord of their life. Which meant that for them, there's no room for other idols.

[9 : 51] We saw that dramatic time when they burned their magic books. And now it's affecting the marketplace because there's no room for the worship of Artemis in their lives.

Now Jesus is lord and him alone. And so love for Jesus as lord means he has no rivals.

There is no place for other gods if we're worshipping Jesus as our lord and saviour. Whether that be the handmade idols like in the marketplace here.

Or perhaps the idols like Demetrius has of money. Or perhaps other idols that our culture bows down to. The idols of sex or power or self.

We deliberately began reading those words from Psalm 96 at the start of our service. Here's some of them to remind you.

[10 : 54] Declare his glory among the nations. His marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord. And most worthy to be praised.

He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations, they're idols. They're nothing compared to the Lord who has made the heavens.

Splendor and majesty are before him. Strength and glory are in his sanctuary. That psalm helps us to see that there is no other god worth bowing down to.

Because our god is great and full of splendor and majesty. There's another passage which I'd love us to just read a few words from.

It's worth turning to. In the book of Isaiah. As the lord speaks to his people about idols. So Isaiah 44. Isaiah 44.

[12:03] Isaiah 44. It's probably worth reading many more verses than we have time for.

But just a snapshot for you. Verse 14. We begin about cutting down trees. He cut down cedars. Or perhaps took a cypress or oak.

He let it grow among the trees of the forest. Or planted a pine. And the rain made it grow. It is used for fuel for burning. Some of it he takes and warms himself.

He kindles a fire and bakes some bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it. He makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire.

Over it he prepares his meal. He roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, Ah, I am warm. I see the fire. And from the rest he makes an idol.

[13:08] A god. He bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, Save me. You are my god. It's mocking. Idol worship.

Using some wood. Which for some of its use. You warm yourself and cook your food on it. And the other bit of the wood. You bow down to it and worship it.

It sounds silly, doesn't it? What can a piece of wood do for you? And so God says to his people.

Verse 22. I have swept away your offenses like a flood.

Speaking of God's mercy. Your sins like the morning mist. Return to me for I have redeemed you.

Can a piece of wood do that?

Sing for joy, you heavens. For the Lord has done this. Shout aloud, you earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains. You forests and all you trees. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob.

[14:09] He displays his glory. In Israel. In Israel. God displays his glory to his people. Why would they worship? Why would they turn to other gods?

Idols. Pieces of woods. Why bow down to created things instead of the creator? God has displayed his glory to his people.

God has displayed his glory to his people there in the Old Testament. Those words of Isaiah. He's also displayed his glory here in our chapter this morning.

In Ephesus. He's displayed it in those amazing healings done through the Apostle Paul. And even more. And even more. As his word has transformed people's lives.

He's displayed his glory in Ephesus. And so no wonder people aren't buying these shrines to the goddess Artemis anymore. No wonder there's an economic crisis.

[15:14] She might claim to help people in labor. But she doesn't claim to save people from an eternity in hell. When the message of Jesus comes.

He exposes. And he confronts the idols of our hearts. And so we can either choose to hear that and bow down to him as Lord and Savior.

Or like Demetrius. Continue to prize those other idols that we have. For Demetrius. The prize in the idols of making money.

Having a successful reputation. And so he's pouring his energy into trying to make that work.

Instead of bowing down to the God that Paul proclaims.

When we come to love Jesus. As Lord and Savior of our lives. There is no room for some things anymore. And there's certainly not room for other gods.

[16:25] Other idols. And surely love for Jesus. Surely living for him gives us far more than anything in this world can give to us.

As Jesus himself said. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world? That Demetrius could gain business over all the world.

Make all the money he could possibly gain. And yet forfeit his soul. Because he's not bowed down to the Lord Jesus. As his Savior and Lord.

Love for Jesus as Lord changes things. It means he has no rivals. And for these new Christians who have come to love Jesus.

And find him Lord of their lives. There was now no room for the worship of Artemis. Verse 23. Let me remind you of it.

[17 : 33] About that time there arose a great disturbance or commotion about the way. That was the root of the problem. Paul declaring Jesus is the way.

The truth. The life. The only way to heaven. Love for Jesus as Lord changes things. It means he has no rivals. And when we're saying that he's the only way to heaven.

Well love for Jesus as Lord means we will face opposition. For believing and preaching a message like that. The great commotion or turmoil.

It continues. It spirals out of the marketplace. Have a look. In verse 28. When they heard this they were furious and began shouting. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Soon the whole city was in uproar. The people seized. Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. And all of them rushed into the theater together.

[18 : 40] So they've gone out onto the street. And there's so many of them. They spill into the theater. Perhaps this would make it in the holiday brochure of Ephesus. The grand theater.

It's at 24,000 people. Which I find astonishing. The Amex Stadium in Brighton. Only sits at 6,000, 7,000 more than that. This is impressive for ancient times.

And on this day in Acts 19. It fills up with this sort of gospel riot or gospel mob. As people are shouting. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

And this mob or this crowd. They attract a crowd. And we're told that actually some weren't even sure why they were there. Verse 32. The assembly was in such confusion.

Some were shouting one thing. Some another. Most of the people didn't know why they were there. That sort of herd mentality. Mob mentality kind of thing. And during it.

[19 : 42] Another guy is brought to the front. This guy Alexander. We're told about in verse 33. He's a Jewish chap.

We don't know whether he was a Jewish convert to Christianity. Or just a remained part of the Jewish religion. One way or another.

He was part of a religion that said you must worship one God alone. But they ignored him. When he tried to make a defense for himself.

And look at what happens in verse 34. For two hours. People were shouting. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[20 : 37] Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. On and on and on for two hours. Imagine as we began our meeting this morning.

Instead of singing praise to the Lord. The Almighty. The King of creation. We just heard that going on and on and on. Trying to drown out our singing. Paul and his companions.

Experiencing this opposition. Because love for Jesus as Lord means we may face opposition. After all people don't want to hear about Jesus.

The only way to heaven. For that confronts the idols of our hearts. It confronts the sin of our hearts. It tells us we're wrong. And we've got to change.

Some will have ears ready to listen to this news. Others will pass by this news and say I'm okay.

Don't need that. But others will strongly oppose the gospel message.

[21 : 52] As people living with Jesus as Lord of our lives. We are to expect opposition. During that two hours of great.

As the Ephesians. Those Christians. Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul's companions. Alexander. How they must have felt alone. Discouraged.

Felt like an alien. Out of place. And that may be how it feels. When we face opposition. Against our faith.

John Chrysostom. Was a preacher. In very early church history. Preaching actively around the years. 350 to 400 kind of years.

He was based not far from Ephesus. In what was then called Constantinople. Now called Istanbul.

He was nicknamed by the church. The Golden Mouth.

[22 : 55] And he wasn't afraid to speak up. To the powers and authorities of the day. Including the emperor. And the emperor opposed him. And told him that he would be put in prison.

For his preaching. But Chrysostom said. It's okay if you put me in prison. Because the Lord will be with me there. So the emperor tried again.

With another threat. Okay. I'll take all your possessions. And Chrysostom replied. Here's his words. There is no way you can take all I possess. My treasures are in heaven.

And you cannot reach that far. So final threat would be. That he would be banished. To the furthest part of the kingdom. Which did happen.

He was banished to a remote island. But Chrysostom said. It's okay. Even in the remotest spot of the world. My father is there.

[23 : 56] John Chrysostom knew. Opposition. To the preaching of the gospel. But he knew. Without doubt. His saviour's words were true. Now that I will be with you.

To the very end of the age. He knew God's promise. True. Never will I leave you. Nor forsake you. And so in the midst of opposition.

That we should expect. As people living with Jesus. As Lord of our lives. We can be reminded. That the Lord Jesus is with us.

By his spirit. And we can be reminded. That Jesus our saviour. And Lord himself. Has suffered opposition. And suffering.

For us. We're going to be reminded of that. When we take communion shortly. Love for Jesus as Lord. Means we will face.

[24 : 54] Opposition. And finally. Love for Jesus as Lord. Means we rest. In God's sovereignty. We see his hand.

Throughout. The book of Acts. At work. And I think we see his hand. At work. Here in this. Chapter T. We see it firstly.

In his protection. For Paul. Surely for Demetrius. Paul was his number one target. He wanted to get rid of. This troublemaker. Who's telling people.

Not to worship. God's created. By human hands. This is the man. Who's destroying his business. But look at. How Paul is protected here.

Verse 30. Paul wanted to appear. Before the crowd. But the disciples. Would not let him. God gave great wisdom. To Paul's companions here.

[25 : 51] It was Paul that was wanted. Who knows what would happen. If Paul ended up in this mob. The Lord was sovereignly.

Protecting Paul from harm here. Through the wisdom of his friends. And the Lord had also raised up. Somebody else. Who protected.

Not just Paul. But the gospel. In this city. The city clerk. Someone in a position of power. We're told in the Bible. The Lord raises people up. To positions of power.

So verse 35. The city clerk. Quiet in the crowd. And said. Fellow Ephesians. Doesn't. Doesn't all the world. Know that the city of Ephesus. Is the guardian of the temple.

Of the great Artemis. And of her image. Which fell from heaven. It's okay. He says. Artemis.

[26 : 45] And her great temple. Is here. It's on the front. Of all the holiday brochures. Artemis is great. We don't have much. To worry about guys. Don't be worried.

Verse 36. Therefore. Since these facts. Are undeniable. Just calm down. And don't do anything rash. After all. These Christians.

Are actually. Pretty harmless. Verse 37. You have brought these men here. Though they have neither robbed temples. Nor blasphemed our goddess. This temple is a great building.

Full of many treasures. If people were really against this. Surely they'd go and rob us. Of our riches. Just don't worry.

You know what. Don't. We can praise God. For this chap. And we can praise God. For good laws as well. Verse 38. If then Demetrius. And his fellow craftsmen. Have a grievance.

[27 : 43] Against anybody. The courts are open. And there are pro consuls. They can press charges. There's a whole legal system. Don't call. Don't call. Don't call mobs on the street. There's a system.

You can go through. You can. And actually. From the city clerk's point of view. He'd be nervous. About the consequences. Of mobs on the street.

Verse 40. As it is. We're in danger. Of being charged. With rioting. Because of what happened today. In that case. We would not. Be able to account.

For this commotion. Since there was no reason. For it. So calm down guys. God was at work here. Through this city clerk.

Through the laws of the land. Protecting. His people. And the gospel's advance. That doesn't mean. That we're going to be protected.

[28 : 38] From. Different sorts of suffering. And even prison. As we go through the rest of Paul. We will see that he will be arrested. He will go on trial.

But here. The Lord is preserving his witness. And we can praise God for that. Preserving his witness. As this city.

Many people in this city. Is known great transformation. Because of the good. Glorious gospel message. In Ephesus.

Here in Acts 19. Though the temple of Artemis. May have sat proudly on the front. Of holiday brochures at the time. Today.

All you would see. Are ruins. Of the temple. Of the temple. Whereas. Paul.

[29 : 36] And the gospel. That he preached. That transformed lives. In this city. 54 AD. That gospel. Is still at work.

That gospel. Hasn't been destroyed. It's still alive. And well. Across the globe. Today. We rest. As people.

Who. Who. Live. For Jesus. As Lord. We rest. In. God's. Sovereignty. Because he has made sure. His gospel. Is still preserved. 2,000 years later. And that's pretty extraordinary. And we see here. In our own city. Though many. May be opposed.

To the gospel message. We see. That things. Are alive. And well. Just look back. To a couple of weekends. Ago.

[30 : 29] The Easter weekend. And good Friday. We were full here. Weren't we? With people. Not just from our church. But from other churches. The gospel. Is alive and well. Yesterday.

I had the privilege. Of being at Bible by the beach. Over in Eastbourne. A thousand Christians. From the southeast. Gathered in Eastbourne. To sing God's praises. The gospel. Is alive and well. It is changing.

People's lives. And we can praise God for that. Because no opposition. Not even Satan. And the gates of hell. Can stand in the way.

Of God building his church. Because our sovereign Lord. Our saviour king. He reigns. His gospel. Has not. And will not fail.

And so we can rest in. And rejoice. In the glorious. Strong. Mighty God. Who has no rivals.

[31 : 31] And whose kingdom. Continues to grow. Across the world. Even in the face. Of opposition. Amen.

Well we're going to sing. A song. About our God. Who is sovereignly. And we're going to remember. That sacrifice.

That he has made for us. At the cross of Calvary now. As we take together. The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper. Is a meal for sinners.

Who are trusting in Jesus. As their only saviour. If that's not you. If you're not trusting Jesus. As your only saviour.

This morning. You're really. Welcome to be here. But please just allow. The bread and wine. To pass you by. In taking this bread and wine.

[32 : 28] We show you. Our unity together. In Christ. Therefore. We ask. That you only take. The Lord's Supper. If you're in good standing. With this church. Or if you're visiting.

With your own local church. It's normal. For people. Who are walking. In fellowship. With Christ. And his church. To clearly mark. Their entrance.

Into spiritual life. By means. Of the sign. Of baptism. If that's. An issue. For you. This morning. If. Baptism.

Is something. You like to do. If you're a Christian. This morning. You haven't done that yet. Please do talk. To myself. Or Phil. Who's been. Playing the guitar. For us. This morning. We're elders. Of the church.

Here. Paul says this. In 1 Corinthians. 11. Whenever you eat this bread. And drink this cup.

[33 : 20] You proclaim the Lord's death. Until he comes. So then. Whoever eats the bread. Or drinks the cup of the Lord. In an unworthy manner. Will be guilty.

Of sinning against the body. And blood of the Lord. So everyone ought to examine themselves. Before they eat of the bread.

And drink from the cup. A moment just to do that quietly. And then we'll join together in a moment with a prayer of confession.
Let's go.