

PM Acts 19:21-20:1 Why are there no riots today?

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[0:00] Acts chapter 19, beginning at verse 21, which is on page 1118.

! We find that not all of the rulers of the earth are against God's reign.

And you'll notice as we read at least one ruler who stands up for the Apostle Paul. So, Acts 19, verse 21.

Now, after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome.

And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

[1:26] About that time, there arose no little disturbance concerning the way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen.

These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades, and said, men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

And there is a danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.

When they heard this, they were enraged, and were crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. So the city was filled with confusion.

[2:51] And they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, they're the rulers of the area, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theatre.

Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defence to the crowd.

But when they recognised that he was a Jew, for about two hours, they all cried out with one voice, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[4:03] And when the town clerk had quietened the crowd, he said, Men of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?

Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.

If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls, let them bring charges against one another.

But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.

And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell, and departed for Macedonia.

[5:37] We'll look at that passage a little later, but let's now bow before God again in prayer. Well, let's turn now to Acts chapter 19.

And this extraordinary riot in Ephesus. Summed up in verse 23, about that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

Whenever the gospel is faithfully preached, we can expect trouble in some form or another.

That ought not to surprise us. The Bible teaches us that we are involved in a spiritual war.

Paul himself writes in Ephesians 6 and verse 12, We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[7:21] He wrote that, remember, to this very church in Ephesus that had experienced this riot. They knew what he was talking about.

Paul wrote later in 2 Corinthians 11 of the many trials that he had endured over the years. Among them, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city.

Wonder if he had Ephesus in mind. Was certainly one of the more dramatic instances of persecution during Paul's missionary journeys.

The truth is that the world has always been opposed to the gospel.

They have their own way of life. And then we come along and we proclaim a different way. And that challenges them.

[8:34] And sometimes it can lead to violence. Jesus warned his disciples about this.

John 15 20 A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. And that is still true today.

In many parts of the world, Christians face persecution. And even occasionally, riots are known today. Here in the UK, rather less so.

We may be regarded with contempt. The world may sometimes laugh at our beliefs. But it's seldom that there's anything worse than that.

And it's certainly hard to imagine a riot in Scotland today. Now we could regard that as simply the kindly providence of God and give thanks for it.

[9:56] But we ought perhaps to ask why is there so little opposition? I've given this sermon the slightly provocative title Why are there no riots today?

Not because I want to see riots. I'm sure none of us wants to see a riot on Tuesday when Douglas Young is preaching. But because it does raise the question is our Christianity in Scotland today perhaps too weak to provoke any kind of real opposition?

Well I want to look at this passage tonight under four headings. Paul's plans in verses 21 to 22 the riot verses 23 to 34 the town clerk's speech in verses 35 to 43 and Paul's departure in chapter 20 verse 1.

21 to And we'll be looking throughout for lessons for today. So first then Paul's plans in verses 21 and 22.

After these events we are told after the Ephesian bonfire after the gospel has spread throughout Asia after these events Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem saying after I have been there I must also see Rome.

[11:49] His work in Ephesus is complete. It's time to move on. The trip to Jerusalem was a kind of diplomatic mission really.

He wanted to collect gifts from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia and take them to Jerusalem for the poor saints there to show the unity of the Gentile and the Jewish church.

After that he wants to see Rome very carefully expressed he doesn't say I want to preach the gospel in Rome for the first time because people had already gone to Rome by this time.

But he wants to go there and encourage their faith as indeed he says in his letter to the Romans and that possibly will be a springboard to the regions beyond.

Well he did go to Jerusalem and he did go to Rome but as I'm sure you know neither worked out quite the way that he would have hoped.

[13:14] He was absolutely right in the plans that he made as you would expect he resolved in the spirit to go to these places but the way it worked out was quite a surprise to him.

He was arrested in Jerusalem and taken as a prisoner to Rome. Small lesson for us there that we must humbly accept it when our plans don't quite work out the way we expected them to, even when we've prayed about it sometimes the Lord has a slightly different way of fulfilling things in our lives than we thought he did. You know not what a day may bring forth we must accept whatever the Lord has in store for us.

But that's the plan Macedonia Achaia Jerusalem Rome Paul sends Timothy and Erastus on ahead while he stays on in Asia for just a little while longer.

Those extra days proved to be highly eventful. So let's look now at the riot verses 23 to 34 about that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

[14:47] Well that's quite an understatement isn't it? There was a huge disturbance. Right at the end the town clerk says verse 40 we really are in danger of being charged with rioting.

well yes they certainly are. He makes it sound as if it's not quite a riot it's just a little bit of local trouble. No this is a major riot.

The way is of course Christianity. That's what it was often called. Acts 9 verse 2 for example Paul before his conversion had gone to Damascus it says looking for anyone who belonged to the way. Acts 19 verse 9 some of the Jews spoke evil about the way. Acts 22 verse 4 Paul admits that he previously persecuted the way.

Presumably it went back to the saying of Jesus I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.

[16:09] But now they're attacked by someone who follows a different way. Verse 24 a man named Demetrius a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis brought no little business to the craftsman.

He now gathers these workmen together warns them about Paul. Verse 26 you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but almost in all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

This could have serious consequences he says. Well too right it could. Paul is hoping that it will have serious consequences.

People will start saying that these silver shrines are a con. They'll start saying that the temple of the great Artemis is nothing. Artemis herself the goddess whom all Asia and the world worship will be deposed from her magnificence as he puts it.

In other words people will see through it all and realise that the whole thing is just a sham. They'll cease to worship Artemis and more to the point they'll stop buying their shrines.

[17:41] Notice here the mix of religious and worldly concerns. That's often the way with persecution. Money comes first before religion.

From this business we have our wealth. He's not really concerned about Artemis is he? I doubt if he even believes in Artemis. He believes in money.

And Artemis is money for him. It's money he mentions first. Only afterwards does he talk about religion. Now what's this all about?

What are these shrines all about? Well at the centre of ancient Ephesus was a magnificent temple. The temple of Artemis.

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus had become a great city because of it. Now Artemis was the Greek goddess of nature and hunting and the moon and childbirth and was therefore a very important figure in Greek mythology.

[19:03] The authorised version calls her Diana which was the Roman equivalent. She was usually portrayed as a rather hideous figure with what appeared to be multiple breasts to symbolise fruitfulness though some scholars think that they may actually be jewels.

But as Demetrius said all the Roman world worshipped her and every year there was a big festival the Artemisia. Temple of Artemis was huge 137 metres long 69 metres wide 18 metres high 127 columns really was magnificent and inside it was the image of the goddess and as the town clock says later verse 35 a sacred stone that was said to have fallen from the sky.

Visitors would buy these silver shrines that they made containing a miniature image of Artemis as a souvenir and possibly as a private act of worship.

So these men are makers of idols. it's not hard to see the similarity here with the worship of the Virgin Mary and all the images of Mary that are sold even today in some of the pilgrim sites of the Roman Catholic Church.

Demetrius then stirs up the silversmiths and a riot begins. First it's just the craftsmen verse 28 when they heard this they were enraged and were crying out great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[21:17] There's a touch of civic pride in this. Ephesus was considered as the guardian of the great goddess. But then it spreads.

The city was filled with confusion. They rushed together into the theater dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus who were Paul's companions in travel. Things are turning ugly.

Paul wants to go in himself. He is never one to stand back when his followers are in danger. But the disciples wouldn't let him. And even the Asiatics, the rulers of the city, who were friends of his, sent a message saying he was not to come.

It was too dangerous. Now that should give us pause for thought. Did we read that right? The Asiatics who were friends of Paul aren't all the rulers of this world against Christ?

Well most of them are. Hence the wording of Psalm 2. But occasionally some of them aren't. Some are even converted.

[22:32] And even those who are not converted sometimes are sympathetic. And Paul here has friends in high places. Rulers of Ephesus who are on his side.

It's not impossible. It's something that we can pray for. Well there's total confusion at this point. Some cried out one thing some another.

Most of them didn't know why they'd come together. I can very much identify with that. Many years ago as a student in Cambridge I got involved in a riot.

I saw a large crowd outside the Senate House. I had no idea what it was all about but I thought it would be interesting to join in. There they all were shouting out their slogans.

Someone up the front was demanding that we vote on something. Couldn't hear what they were saying but sure enough we all put our hands up. Most of us probably hadn't a clue what it was all about.

[23:43] To this day I don't know what it was about. I suspect it may have been a little bit like that in Ephesus that day. Some of the Jews in the crowd bring forward a man called Alexander who tried to make a defense.

It's hard to see why they put him forward. He was a Jew. The riot wasn't against the Jews but then perhaps they didn't know that. They're probably used to riots against the Jews and assumed it was. Maybe this was a Jewish sympathizer with Paul or maybe the Jews just felt threatened because they also believed in the one true God and they also rejected the worship of Artemis.

Jews today of course feel very threatened even in our own country. But they just shout him down for about two hours they all cried out with one voice great is Artemis of the Ephesians two hours the length of this service and again another hour after that nothing but just this one slogan great is Artemis of the Ephesians great is Artemis of the Ephesians great is Artemis of the Ephesians I think I'd go mad just hearing it but they carry on just fanatically crying out this slogan again it's hard not to make a comparison with today isn't it isn't this exactly like these fanatical Muslim crowds today shouting out in Arabic Allahu

Akbar over and over again as if merely repeating it again and again will make it true of course Artemis is not great no matter how many times they repeat it Artemis is nothing she is an idol made with human hands unable to do anything and we might say if those Muslim fanatics too that Allah as they conceive of him is not great their concept of God is a complete corruption of the truth and is anything but great Jesus is great truly great he is the king of kings he is the savior of the world he is truly able to change our lives he alone can save us from our sins he alone can give us eternal life if we wanted to chant great is

[26:52] Jesus the son of God we'd be perfectly entitled to do so and it would be true! but that's not the Christian way simply to shout slogans over and over again nor is it the Christian way to shout down the opposition the Christian way is one of calm reason remember how Paul reasoned and persuaded the people in the synagogue way back in verse 8 he reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus in verse 9 but all that these crowds can do is shout for two hours who will put an end to all this who

will rescue Gaius and Aristarchus from the mob who will protect the Christians well the hero of the hour turns out to be the town clerk that's rather mundane isn't it we'd expect something more spectacular but no it's just the ordinary town clerk who comes out and makes a speech and rescues the whole situation so let's look at his speech now verses 35 to 41 when the town clerk had quietened the crowd he reasons with them now he speaks as a pagan so he makes concessions that we wouldn't make but his words have the desired effect men of

Ephesus who is there who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky!

Yes they'd be thinking that's true we've nothing to be worried about now he's calmed them he can reason with them seeing that these things cannot be denied you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash and he reminds them that they've got no real case against these Christians you've brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess the authorised version says that they're not temple robbers which is also true now that gives us a little insight into the tone of Paul's preaching yes undoubtedly he had said plainly that gods made with hands are not gods as Demetrius complains in verse 26 he'd spoken out plainly against idolatry but he'd not gone out of his way to be offensive and if they had done anything wrong well this was not the way to deal with it by raising a riot rather verse 38 if

Demetrius and the craftsman with him have a complaint against anyone the courts are open there are proconsuls let them bring charges against one another but if you seek any further it shall be settled in the regular assembly it's a calm appeal for law and order and he adds a warning in verse 40 for we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today since there's no cause that we can give to justify this commotion the Romans didn't take kindly to public disorder and they will deal severely with a riot like this and then he dismisses the assembly now this was not the first time that Paul had encountered hostility from a Gentile crowd in the early days it was usually the Jews but increasingly they were facing opposition from the

Gentiles think of Philippi in Acts 16 money was behind that too wasn't it the owners of the slave girl who had lost their income when an evil spirit was cast out of her they dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates and all the crowd joined in think of Athens in Acts 17 where he was mocked by the philosophers and dragged before the Areopagus here again is a Gentile crowd opposing Paul and he is rescued by a Gentile by the town clerk now Roman justice didn't always work out in Paul's favour in Philippi he was imprisoned and only very reluctantly released but here the town clerk upholds the law in favour of

[32:01] Paul that is how government is supposed to work the government is supposed to uphold justice years later Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus urging that the Christians should pray for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way I wonder if he had Ephesus the riot in the back of his mind well we too must pray for those in authority we might despair of them sometimes but they need our prayers prayers that we might have good laws and that they might uphold those laws good government like this is part of God's order for the world if

Paul had rushed in and defended himself that day he could have been lynched worse still if he and his companions had taken up swords to fight the Romans would have crushed them as rebels there may be times when we can't trust the authorities but the right thing that day was to rely on the forces of law and order so finally we come to Paul's departure chapter 20 verse 1 after the uproar ceased Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them he said farewell and departed for Macedonia wasn't running away this was what he planned beforehand to go to Macedonia but before he goes notice he encourages them they must have been quite shaken and possibly quite fearful but

Paul reassures them no doubt he reminds them that the Lord is with them their cause is right no matter what men might think Jesus is Lord not Artemis and even the town authorities are under God's control the Asiarchs had stood up for Paul the town clerk had stood up for Paul pray for these men who knows whether maybe they might one day be converted so he departs we learn later from verse four that Gaius and Aristarchus went with them and despite this riot at the end it had been a

successful two years in Ephesus now as we close let's reflect on this that we will face opposition if we are faithful

Jesus warned his disciples plainly John 15 19 if you were of the world the world would love you but because you are not of the world therefore the world hates you if they persecuted me they will persecute you and it isn't just preachers that they will hate Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 12 all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution if there is no opposition we have to ask if something is wrong Jesus said in Luke 6 blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the son of man but woe to you when all men speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets now

I don't want to see riots like this in Dumfries and we certainly shouldn't be provoking riots but you do have to ask why are there no riots against Christianity in Scotland today has the church become so irrelevant that no one even bothers to oppose it certainly we have to say that some churches have become so taken up with social justice and with the woke agenda of the modern world that the world regards them as their friends and even some of us perhaps we preach the gospel so quietly and apologetically that no one takes any notice indifferent preaching will produce an indifferent response the church needs to be preaching the cross plainly and clearly even though it is an offence to man we must preach

[37:35] Christ crucified we must preach the truth plainly and clearly because that alone will challenge the world may our preaching be clear and convicting today and may our lives be as light in the darkness finally let me say anyone here who is not yet a Christian don't be deterred by the opposition that you might face Christianity is true whatever people might think of it Jesus is Lord whatever people might think of him he alone is the saviour of the world he alone is your saviour in whom you must trust a