

Faith Under Fire

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Date: 02 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles. We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you and strengthen your faith.

Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message. I know most of you are familiar with the store Hobby Lobby. What some of you may not be familiar with is the store, the chain of stores, is owned by a Christian family.

A few years ago, the owners of Hobby Lobby challenged the Affordable Care Act, requiring employers to provide certain coverage or coverage for certain contraceptives, Plan B, which the owners of Hobby Lobby equated with abortion.

The owners could not, with a clear conscience, condone such a provision. So what they did was they decided to fight it and not to provide that coverage.

There was some backlash, but the owners stood firm, and they realized that their values were much more important than making a profit.

[1 : 16] You know, this scenario sounds kind of familiar because there are many other businesses that have faced backlash because of their decisions having to do with their faith.

And what we're going to see this morning in the book of Acts is a similar kind of story where the Apostle Paul and his preaching the gospel and so many coming to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, their lives began to change, and there was repercussion because the message of Jesus Christ began changing the culture, and it began to challenge the status quo there in the city of Ephesus and around there in Asia.

Here's the thing. These types of challenges aren't new. In the Bible, we find countless examples of people who faced resistance because of their faith.

And we're going to see that this morning where Paul encounters that in the city of Ephesus. And what he comes up to is a riot. It's a mob.

It was a little bit unusual because it was fueled by a number of things. It was fueled by greed. It was fueled by religious fervor and also a fear of change.

[2 : 36] Paul was disrupting the status quo. Not everyone around was happy with it. So what can we learn from Paul's experience this morning in the book of Acts?

How can we stand firm in our faith when the world seems to push back on us? So this morning, we're going to look at this story in Acts chapter 19, verses 21, all the way through to the end of the chapter, verse number 41.

Standing strong in the mission that God has called us to, even when the road gets rough and when our faith is under fire. So let's open our Bibles.

Acts chapter 19, beginning with verse number 21. We're going to see as we jump in this morning, Paul's focus on his mission. And despite the challenges, sets the stage for understanding how we can stand firm, even when our faith as well is under fire.

Verse number 21, when these things were accomplished. What is these things that Luke is talking about? Well, he's referring back a few verses up where those in the area had brought all of their books of the occult and had burned them.

[3 : 52] They had repented of this sinful act that they had not repented from earlier. They committed themselves or recommitted themselves to Jesus Christ.

And the gospel spread, verse number 20. And the word of the Lord grew mightily in that area. So Luke says in verse number 21, The text tells us that Paul purposed in the spirit, or purposed in his spirit.

We're not sure exactly based upon the text because the text doesn't capitalize words in the original. So was it talking about Paul's spirit? Was it talking about the Holy Spirit?

Well, the original Greek word used here for purposed is the Greek word *etheto*, and it suggests a deep intentional resolve. So whatever the case, I believe this was a spirit-led decision that Paul made.

I mean, he made the decision, but I believe it was a decision that was led by the Holy Spirit. Paul wasn't just making a decision on a whim and saying, I'm going to do this because I feel like doing it. [5 : 20] But he was aligning his actions with the mission that God had called him to. He knew that his mission was to spread the gospel, and he understood that wherever he went, there was going to be some problems.

I mean, that was kind of a set thing for Paul. Everywhere he went, eventually, things got tough. People rejected the message, and they either wanted to arrest him or kill him, and he would go from place to place.

And he understood that wherever he went, there was going to be some opposition because of the gospel. But he didn't let fear or uncertainty dictate his actions. He decided that he was going to continue being on the mission of presenting the gospel wherever he went, and he trusted the Holy Spirit's guidance.

We see a number of times where Paul intended to go somewhere, but the Holy Spirit said, no, Paul, I want you to go here. Or don't go there. And Paul didn't know where, so he would try to go somewhere else.

And the Spirit said, no, not there either. And then he would tell him, okay, Paul, I want you to go here. But Paul kept his eyes on the bigger picture, the mission that God had for him.

[6 : 24] And I think this is a reminder for us today. Keep our eyes focused on the mission, even when the world fights back or gives us some opposition. Stay true to the missions.

We often face decisions, don't we? Day in, day out sometimes, where it's easy to do what's comfortable or choose between what's easy and what's right.

The question is, what drives our decisions? Faith or fear? Here's the thing. Paul stayed focused on his mission. So as we move on this morning in these next few verses, so these first few verses tell us that Paul continued.

He wanted to go. He sends his two workers on ahead. And I think this highlights how sometimes our faith can disrupt the status quo and people won't be happy with it.

Now let's look at verses 23 to 28. We get into the meat of what we see in the story here this morning. And about that time, about that time that Paul sends these two workers out, he says, Luke says, there arose a great commotion about the way for a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith who was probably head of their local metalworking guild, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.

[7 : 46] Luke was famous for extremes. Exaggeration. He used hyperbole a lot. And he used another figure of speech, and we'll see it again a little later on in verse 20 and following.

He says there was no little commotion, meaning there was a lot of commotion. So it was kind of his way of bringing attention to it. He says there was no small profit to the craftsmen.

So he called them together. He called the guild of metal workers, silver workers, silversmiths together, workers of similar occupation, and said, so remember, the gospel is what Paul was preaching.

God was changing lives through the Holy Spirit, and he was bringing truth to the people. But what's Demetrius concerned about? Look at what he says.

Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. You know we make a lot of money making idols for people, making people's personal idols.

[8 : 53] You know, we get these orders, and this is our livelihood. This is our prosperity. Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia.

Notice the impact Paul was having. He said, Paul, almost throughout all Asia, Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying there are no gods which are made with hands.

Now, the Old Testament even tells us that. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, and then he tacks on, I believe, this at the end.

I think Demetrius was more worried and more concerned about his livelihood and his profit than he was about the religion. He says, But also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised,

and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.

Now, was that actually true? No, not really, because Diana was not worshipped throughout the world. This was something, Artemis was one of, was the Roman equivalent, and then here we have Diana, and it was confined to a certain geographical area.

[10:04] So he's trying to say, he's making it more wide than it really is. Verse 28, Now when they heard this, when the silversmiths heard it, they were full of wrath and cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And so we see the ripple effect of Paul's mission, and it begins to challenge the very fabric of Ephesus and the area around. This verse tells us, these verses tell us that there was a great commotion about the way.

The way here talks about Christianity. The followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life. See, the gospel was not just a set of beliefs.

It was a lifestyle. It was how Jesus changed a life, and those who followed Jesus lived a certain way, and it disrupted the status quo. So we see in this disruption, how Demetrius, a silversmith, excuse me, whose business thrived on making personal items, realized, when he looked at his books, we're getting fewer orders.

And if this continues, if this trend continues, we're going to be out of business before too long. And so he reacted. I don't think he was angry about Paul's theology so much as he was about that the gospel was changing people's lives.

[11:29] They realized there's no idols made with hands. There's only one God, the true God, and so therefore we don't need these silver tchotchkes that we put up in our certain place in our home.

We don't need these. The spread of Christianity threatened his profit-making business, and he wasn't happy about it. They were more concerned with their jobs than they were with Diana and her temple.

So what did they do? We see that they incited a riot. And it was a mob. Benjamin Franklin said that a mob was a monster with heads enough but no brains.

So all of these people, they don't even know why. We're going to see a little bit later. They don't even know why they're there together. They don't know why they're gathered all together. And so they start chanting certain things.

The uproar really wasn't about religion. It was more about economics. So having started on an economic note, we're going to see that what happens is it turns into religious fervor and begins to get out of control.

[12:43] So we can expect a disruption when our faith challenges the status quo. And here's the thing. The gospel changes people's lives. This reminds me of the great Welsh revival of 1904 and 1905.

A great spiritual awakening swept across Wales. And it led to days-long prayer meetings. It led to spirit-led emotional worship.

People were repenting of their sin. Widespread repentance. And it impacted entire communities. And it began to impact businesses in that area.

As a matter of fact, many saloons and taverns closed because they lost so much business. Many of the theaters and the gambling establishments lost people because the people chose to go to church instead of going there.

As a matter of fact, the coal mines experienced a rather unique issue. Now, the coal mines wasn't necessarily a sinful business in and of itself. But the coal mining industry, the coal miners' culture, they were rough.

[13:53] They tended to be heavy drinkers. They tended to be using foul language. And so when the miners trusted Jesus, their language changed.

And they stopped cursing. Well, the pit ponies, who were used to haul the carts of coal, were so used to the foul language that when they started telling the pit ponies what to do and they weren't cursing, the pit ponies got confused and they didn't know what to do.

And they weren't moving. They weren't going. And so the coal mines even suffered from it. And they said that crime even plummeted. When people trusted Christ, they stopped stealing.

And they stopped doing all the things that criminals tend to do. And they said the judges would sit in empty courtrooms. And they didn't have any cases to hear.

It says that the police even kind of started to twiddle their thumbs. And it said some of them even started choirs to sing during the revival.

[14:54] So the gospel changes lives. And oh, that we could see a revival in our country today and see what God's Holy Spirit can do through changed lives.

I think this is a powerful reminder how faith changes people. And as followers of Jesus, we need to be ready for some pushback. What did Jesus warn in John chapter 15, verses 18 through 19? He said the world hates you. They're only doing it because they hated me first. And so Paul's just simply experiencing what Jesus had warned of. So now we see the situation in Ephesus escalates into chaos and a mob forming in confusion and anger.

Let's move on to verses 29, to verse 34. Verse 29. So the whole city, it says, was filled with confusion and rushed into the theater, or that open area called the theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus.

They were Macedonians. They were also Paul's traveling companions. And when Paul wanted to go into the people, Paul said, hey, this is a great opportunity. The theater is full of people out here and said, I can just talk about Jesus.

[16:06] But some of them pleaded with him, don't go into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused.

And I think this is rather amusing for most of them. And most of them did not know why they had come together. So they were probably looking at each other. Why are we here? I don't know. But my neighbors left and they said, hey, we're going to the theater. So there's an uproar or there's something going on. And people said, hey, let's go. And that's why people, a lot of people tend to be right. What's going on?

I don't know, but there's something happening downtown. Well, let's go. And so they're all there and they're milling around. Why are we here? I don't know. Why are we here? I don't know. And so he says, and they drew Alexander out of the multitude.

And I think this is amusing too. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews pushing him forward. Here you are, you're Alexander. And people are pushing you out of the front.

[17:02] You get out in front of everybody and you're like, okay, what do I do now? So what does he do? It says, he motioned with his hand and wanted to make defense to the people.

But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out. So the crowd is chanting for almost two hours.

Think about it. Two hours, almost two hours pass. And they're chanting, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

So most of them didn't even know why they were there. This just goes to show how easily people can be swept away without understanding the true cause of what they were doing.

Now I find it interesting in verse number 32. Verse number 32. Some therefore cried one thing and some another for the assembly.

[17:59] I find it interesting that the word here, the Greek word that Luke used when he wrote this, is the word ekklesia. It's the same word that's used for the church.

The church of Jesus Christ is called ekklesia. And it just means a called out assembly. And so when Luke writes this, he says the ekklesia. But he's not talking about the church of Jesus Christ.

He's actually talking about a mob. What a contrast. Between people gathering in faith to worship Jesus and people gathering in a mob and they don't even know what they're doing.

They're driven by confusion. They're driven by manipulation. So since the mob couldn't find Paul, what do they do? They seized two of his helpers, Gaius and Aristarchus.

By the way, this is not the Gaius of chapter 20. This Gaius was from Macedonia. The Gaius in chapter 20 was of Derbe, beside the point here. But we're going to see that next week when we get into chapter number 20.

[19:06] And Paul wanted to enter the theater, wanted to enter that great open area where the mob was. So I'm sure he wanted to preach. But the believers and some of the city leaders who had begun to follow Jesus Christ wisely was counseling Paul.

Paul, stay out of there because it's dangerous. We don't want you to get hurt. Here's the thing. You know, not every fight is ours to fight. Sometimes we need to use a little bit of wisdom and let God take care of it.

And let God in His sovereignty take care of things. Sometimes wisdom calls for a more measured response. Before long, we see that racial prejudice comes in.

This Jew, Alexander, comes in and he says, when they realized that he was a Jew, they all began crying out, great is Diana.

Alexander's trying to quiet the crowd. No doubt he was wanting to explain that the Jews who were living here didn't necessarily agree with Paul's theology or agree with what Paul was saying.

[20 : 17] And so therefore the Jews shouldn't be made escape goats just to satisfy the crowd. But his being there only aroused the crowd even more.

And so they began chanting for almost two hours. The thing that most likely protected the Jews was their freedom of religion granted by Rome.

So they were at least protected by that. So as the chaos in Ephesus begins to reach its peak, we see something unusual happens. Verse 35 to 41 as we continue with the rest of the chapter.

And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, remember, almost two hours, they were crying, they were chanting, crying out, great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And people don't even know what they're doing. But you know what? When some people started shouting, other people started shouting, they joined in on the chant. And the whole thing lasting a couple hours. And then one of the city officials, city clerk, but he was most likely a fairly high-ranking official, and he tries to quiet the crowd.

[21 : 25] He said, Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana and of the image which fell down from Zeus?

This was their mythology. Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.

For you have brought these men, and he says, they are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of the goddess. You find that Paul wasn't talking bad about Diana.

I think this should inform us when we're sharing the gospel, don't put down people's faith. Don't tell them that what they're believing is wrong. Just tell them what's right.

Because people react when you tell them, you don't believe right. Your faith is not right. It's not going to get you to heaven. Now, it's true, but when people understand and the Holy Spirit opens up their eyes and they understand the gospel and they believe, that is what changes their lives.

[22 : 40] Not winning an argument. Not forcing them to believe that what they believe is wrong. Because usually people are going to react badly to that approach. So Paul wasn't putting down Diana.

He wasn't preaching against Diana. He was preaching in favor of Jesus Christ. And so he says, neither are they blasphemers of your goddess. So it's a good possibility that the city clerk didn't even worship Diana.

Therefore, verse 38, he says, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open. Take it to court.

It's a civil matter. The courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any inquiry to make, it shall be done at a lawful assembly or determined in the lawful assembly.

Let's do this thing by the book. For we are in danger of being called into question for today's uproar. What if Rome finds out? And they ask us, how did you let this get out of hand?

[23 : 50] We're going to come in and then they were going to call in martial law and they were going to set things right. We don't need Rome coming in here and messing things up. So we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar.

There being no reason which we may give account for this disorderly gathering. And then verse 41, And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

And we can read into this, they all went home. So here we see a surprising turn of events as the city clerk comes up and he calls everything to order, comes in and he stems the chaos.

And most likely, this city clerk had no allegiance to the Christian faith, possibly had no allegiance to Diana as well because he calls her your goddess, uses logic, and then he uses an appeal that says, you know what, we're afraid of Rome.

So there were a fear of repercussion from Rome to restore order. He reminds them that they're in danger of being called into question for the uproar. essentially, he's telling the whole crowd, listen,

let's not get in trouble over this.

[25 : 09] If you want to carry this further, it's a civil matter. Go to the pro-council, bring it to the courts, and let them decide. Don't let this crowd get out or this riot get out of hand.

I find it interesting that God uses this pagan official to protect Paul in the early church. We've seen this happen before. God in his sovereignty takes the matter in his hands and he uses people that you wouldn't ordinarily expect to take care of this and handle it.

So the city clerk quietens the crowd. He says, there's no reason for this uproar. There's no reason for this riot. If you've got something against them, bring it to the courts and let the courts decide. Otherwise, you all need to disperse. Go home. Otherwise, we're going to be in trouble. No one wanted trouble from Rome, obviously. The gospel changed lives.

But think about this. What was Demetrius afraid of? Losing his job. People were afraid of their goddess Diana. But Ephesus is gone. The Ephesus that was there during Paul's day.

[26 : 20] Worldwide worship of Diana is no more. The city and the temple are gone. The silversmith's guild no longer exist. That existed then.

But the gospel still stands. So I think this ought to tell us that God is in. God is still in control. So Ephesus, the Ephesus of this day where Paul was there, primarily is only visited by archaeologists and people on Holy Land tours.

Yet the gospel of Jesus Christ is still there. So think about it when we face what seems to be insurmountable circumstances.

God is still there. Romans 8.28 God knows his own and he assures that in all things God is going to work out for good all things to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.

Remember Hobby Lobby? In the 2014 Supreme Court case *Burwell versus Hobby Lobby stores*, the court ruled in favor of Hobby Lobby.

[27 : 31] And they said that closely held for-profit corporations could be exempt from regulations that violate their religious beliefs. So the family who owns Hobby Lobby said no, we can't do this because this violates our faith.

It was brought all the way. They were sued. It was brought all the way to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court said they don't have to do it because of their faith.

So this doesn't mean that every situation is going to turn out like it did for Paul, like it did for Hobby Lobby, but the thing is we can still trust God's in control no matter what happens.

As we navigate the challenges of our life, we can rest in the assurance that God is sovereign. He's working behind the scenes to bring about his perfect plan.

So this morning as we wrap up, stand firm in your faith, understand that God is in control. Standing up for our faith isn't always easy and it may bring repercussions. When we challenge the status quo, when our faith challenges the status quo, it will bring opposition just like Paul.

[28 : 38] Stay focused on our mission. So, what does it mean today? Stand firm, live missionally, and be ready to stand firm for your beliefs.

It means seeking God's will in every situation. You know, sometimes when there's conflict, the wisest thing to do is let God handle it. We don't always have to take matters into our own hands.

Let God take care of it. So, commit to standing firm in our faith. Do what's right, even when it's not easy. Trusting that God's with us in every trial. And, remember the name of Demetrius?

Faded in history. The only reason why we even heard the name Demetrius is because of this uproar. But the gospel of Jesus Christ stays and it transforms our lives.

So, how will we be part of God's ongoing mission? So, let's pray for the courage to live out our faith boldly, trusting that God will use us to make a difference in our world.

[29 : 40] Let's pray. Father, we come to you this morning. We thank you for your goodness. We thank you for your mercy, your grace, your loving kindness. We thank you for being in control. We thank you for your sovereignty.

We pray this morning that you would help us to face everything in our lives with faith, realizing that you are in control. Nothing takes you by surprise.

And we ask this morning that you may be with us and comfort us and give us the strength because we know that the battle is yours, not ours. We thank you for all that you're going to do.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks for joining us today. We hope this message encouraged you and gave you something to apply to your life this week.

If you'd like to learn more about Faith Bible Church or connect with us, visit our website at meetfaith.org. We'd love to hear from you. Have a great week and we'll see you next time.
[30 : 41] We'll see you next time.