

Acts 19:1-41

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Rev. Ryan Spear

[0 : 00] Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.! Disruptive chapter in the book of Acts.

And if I could pick one word to describe it, it's this word. Disruptive. Disruptive. It's a disruptive chapter. Now, a disruption is anything that breaks or interrupts the current state of things and prevents it from continuing as usual.

It breaks or interrupts and prevents it from continuing as usual. Now, a disruption can be positive or it can be negative. And we think of the negative ones most often, don't we?

So one example, this is kind of petty. I was doing some preparation at Regent's, a theological school near UBC. And they're doing construction. Anyone been by there to see the construction they're putting up near Regent's?

Well, now there's just one door you can go in. You have to go, like, across the street and around the block. It's very disruptive. And it only adds only, like, five minutes or so to my walk. But there's an example.

[1 : 20] I can't go on as usual. I have to account for something blocking my way, something stopping me from doing what I would normally do. But we also think of disruptions positively. Right?

You most often hear this in, like, tech areas, right? Uber has disrupted the taxi industry. Netflix has disrupted streaming. It's seen as a positive force for change. And not just like, oh, isn't it nice that we have another option alongside taxis?

But Uber, like, fundamentally changes the world as we know it for that industry. And this is what's going on in Ephesus in Acts 19. What we're seeing is the disruptive power of the gospel.

And what it's doing is disrupting in three ways. It's disrupting hearts, priorities, and worldviews. Hearts, priorities, and worldviews. Now, this is a huge chapter, so we're going to get right into it. It's like we've been watching our favorite show and suddenly decide to, like, binge watch three episodes back to back. This is kind of what we're doing right now by getting right into Acts 19.

[2 : 22] It is incredible. Now, we're going to look at these three disruptions. And we're going to pray for the Holy Spirit to show us how he wants to disrupt our own hearts, priorities, and worldviews.

So let's get right after it. Let's get into our first disruption. A disruption of the heart. And it disrupts them by completing an incomplete picture. So look at the first ten verses in Acts 19.

Now, we have here a scene with two different groups. I think Luke here is doing something really interesting. He's pairing events together. So look with me right here.

Acts verse 1 of chapter 19. Paul comes across a group of disciples. Now, there's just one problem with this group of disciples. They only know half the story. They only have half the picture.

Paul asks them, have you received the Holy Spirit when you believe? And they're like, I didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit. I'm not sure if you've ever used that excuse when asked, did you do your homework?

[3 : 22] I didn't even know there was homework. Did you remind you to pick up that thing at the store? I didn't even know I needed to pick up that thing at the store. It's complete ignorance. Not even aware that they don't know the full story.

So Paul explains what they've been missing, and it's all right in verse 4. They've understood John the Baptist's message. They get repentance. They get waiting for a Messiah.

But they just stayed stuck in that place. Waiting. Being repentant. And I don't know what Paul was thinking in that moment, but I can kind of imagine his excitement.

Here he meets 12 people who are primed and ready. I'm wondering if he was like, oh, you're going to love what I'm about to tell you. You've been repentant. You've been waiting for the Messiah. I have got great news for you.

He's met a hunger group that's looking for good news, and he gets to be the one that fills in the missing piece. So they get baptized in the name of Jesus, and the same presence that fell upon the apostles at the beginning of Acts at Pentecost falls on them.

[4 : 24] What's happening to them isn't some pattern for how faith works, for how belief works, but it's validation, it's proof that the same God is with them that was with the apostles from the beginning.

So this is kind of like one of those adventure movies, you know, where like one character has like part of a map, but the other character comes along and is like, oh, you need this special thing to look through.

It'll reveal the location of the treasure. It's kind of like where they were in. They had some part of the puzzle. They had part of the map, part of the picture. But they needed Paul and the message of the gospel to fill it out.

And Paul disrupts their incomplete picture, and he fills it in for them with the most important part, Jesus. The answer in their hearts to the hunger they have for true forgiveness that's lasting and new life that's sustaining.

But now, right away, we meet a second group of people. Verse 8. Paul enters the synagogue as he does. This is his pattern. And he spends three months with them, speaking boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

[5 : 29] So what's this kingdom of God he's talking to them about? Well, in short, it's not an outside thing. It's not something that happens out there, like a political ruler or overthrowing the Romans.

It's an inside thing. It's Jesus reigning in their hearts, presently active with his people. Now, this group was waiting, too, like those disciples that didn't have the full picture.

They were waiting. They were waiting for God to restore Israel to its rightful place. They wanted God to bring the hammer down on the Romans and the Gentiles. But in the face of Paul's bold, reasoned, and persuasive arguments, instead he meets stubbornness, unbelief, and slander.

Why is this? Why didn't they respond joyfully like the disciples did? Well, this kind of reminds me of a line from the Batman movie Dark Knight. Christopher Nolan. It's been out for a while.

There's this scene where Commissioner Gordon is sharing about what it means to be a hero. And he describes someone this way. He says, He's a hero. Not the hero we deserved, but the hero we needed.

[6 : 41] Not the hero we deserved, but the hero we needed. But in this case, Jesus was the disruptive hero they needed, just not the one they thought they deserved.

See, the second group, the second group of Jews that were gathered together in Ephesus, part of the diaspora, the Jews who had spread throughout this area of Asia, were waiting on a Messiah, sure.

But they wanted one that would change the situation outside, change the politics, change their position in the world. Not one that would change their hearts. And certainly not one that would suggest that they should call Gentiles their brothers and sisters.

So notice the contrast. Both groups have an incomplete picture. And this is a problem of the heart. But sadly, the outcomes differ. One gladly allows Jesus to disrupt their hearts and complete the picture.

The other hardens their heart. So what do we learn about this in Vancouver today, this first disruption? I mean, first of all, we learn that the disruption of the good news of Jesus starts in the heart.

[7 : 43] It's an inside-out disruption. And secondly, while the situations are different in many ways, our tendency to have an incomplete picture of who Jesus is remains.

We still carry around with us an incomplete view of who Jesus is and what he wants to do in our life. So we pray. We pray regularly for Jesus to continue to disrupt our incomplete pictures.

Just like God's kingdom has already begun but is not fully here, it's the same in our hearts. This is what growing in Christlikeness means. This is why in our tradition here at St. John's, we are graciously led to confession regularly.

It's our chance to ask daily for ongoing disruption and to remember again who Jesus is and his utter sufficiency. So that's the scene one.

That's disruption one. A disruption of the heart. An incomplete picture that's completed by the good news of Jesus. So that's our first disruption in Ephesus. Our second one is all about power and

priorities.

[8 : 48] So disruption two starts in verse 11 and it's a disruption of priorities. All right, in this next set of scenes we're encountering some exorcists who get beat up and some believers who go for broke with Jesus.

Now let's look at the beat up exorcists. So verse 11, after Paul is rejected in the synagogue, he moves on to a public meeting hall, a Gentile audience. And he does this for two solid years. One commentary said it was likely he lectured for five hours a day. He was putting in the work. And verse 11 tells us that Paul's ministry of word was also being validated, proven to be true by powerful miracles God worked through Paul.

Now here's where things get spicy. In verse 13, some itinerant Jewish exorcists, itinerant means they travel around, this is kind of their gig, most likely it was a money-making thing they did. So they get word that in the name of Jesus some pretty interesting things were happening, so they decide to give it a try.

But we see in verses 15 and 16, when they encounter an evil spirit who tells them, well, I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul, but I don't know who you are. They try to use this power in the name of Jesus and it does not go well for them.

[10 : 03] It goes as horribly as could possibly go. They get thoroughly beaten up. They're humiliated. Why did this happen? Why couldn't they just invoke the name of Jesus, like some kind of incantation?

Well, when I was growing up, I grew up a little bit in Texas. I'm a pastor's kid, so I moved around. So while we were living in Texas, we'd sometimes see this billboard around town and it would say, Have you tried Jesus?

Have you seen this campaign before? Have you tried Jesus? Now, it's well-meaning. I think it does come from a place of wanting people to consider Jesus who had not really encountered him before. But there's a slight problem with it is to kind of assume that you're just sort of walking down the grocery store and right next to the soda and then maybe the magazines.

Oh, there's Jesus. I actually haven't tried Jesus. Maybe I will. He's an option among many options that you could try if all else fails. See, that's kind of what happened to these seven sons.

[11 : 04] They tried Jesus. Oh, let's just add him into our toolkit. Let's add him to our list of options. Kind of like a password. Seems to work for Paul. It'll work for us. But the problem with them is there was no heart change.

Their hearts hadn't been disrupted. They had no faith in the name of Jesus. They just wanted to use it for their own ends. Their priorities were all wrong. So now word gets around Ephesus.

Notice, that's the first group. One group that tries to use Jesus' name is like a password to get their own way, to make themselves great. So word then gets around Ephesus, and it's not just in Jewish circles anymore, that the name of Jesus can't just be used to wield power like any other magical incantation or technique.

And in verses 18 to 20, we see the gospel get into the hearts of a group of believers, disrupting their priorities, and they go for broke. What does it mean to go for broke? It means you put it all on the line.

It says here that there are believers that are repenting of their use of magic arts. Now magic back then is a form of manipulation. It's about power.

[12 : 09] It's about controlling. Being protected from harm, getting what you want. But when the gospel gets into their hearts, it also disrupts their priorities. So instead of looking for power in human tools, they instead trust their lives and future to Jesus.

So they go for broke. They bring out their old ways, their magic practices, and they burn them. Now notice here, this isn't like a way of proving something to Jesus or their community about their faith. It was a logical next step. If Jesus is who he says he is, this is what life in him looks like. I was growing up in Texas as well.

We would go to like summer camps, Christian camps, things like that. And I know Jacob told this story because we have a shared past in this. It was kind of a thing to go to summer camp and pretty much guaranteed somebody would bring out a stack of CDs.

Anyone know what I'm about to tell you? Yeah, okay, here's some chuckles. They bring out a stack of CDs. It's powerful testimony. I used to listen to secular music.

[13:12] But now that I'm a Christian, I don't do that anymore. And on stage, very dramatically, they'd break their CDs. And now I feel like we've lost something special. You can't just bring out your iPhone and watch me delete my playlists.

It just doesn't seem to have the same effect. Now, I'm not saying that's what we should do. I'm not saying that that's the equivalent. It's not a form of showing how great I am, how pious I am. But it does demonstrate the no turning back. Right? Once you've broken that CD, you ain't putting it back into your CD player. That thing is gone. So it's kind of like that level of commitment. You might have heard of the phrase, burning the ships. Some explorers would land on some land, and they'd say, we're going to burn the ships. We're not turning back. That old way of life is gone. And notice the value of what they've just done here. Now, one piece of silver was equivalent to about one day's wages. And that's 50,000 days' wages.

[14:12] 50,000. So in today's money, that's like one person working for 137 days, sorry, 137 years straight. In a city like Vancouver, in today's dollars, that's like 10 to 15 million dollars worth.

Now, again, they aren't destroying this in an act of passionate devotion or to prove something to Jesus or to the crowd. It's a way of disrupting their whole way of life and community.

You know, see, if they sold it, it would be simply communicating to others, well, this doesn't work for me, but it might work for you. If it does, good for you. No, they are removing this from circulation. They're removing themselves from this entire way of thinking about control and power and priorities. So what does that mean for us? The gospel disrupts our own priorities, where we look for power, where we look for control.

The Sons of Scevas scene teaches us that you can't just add Jesus to your toolkit. You can't just invoke his name when you run into trouble to see how it works. On the flip side, the believers, when they see the power of Jesus over their own use of magic, again, ways of manipulating and controlling their future, it changes their own priorities.

[15:28] Now, we might not call it magic anymore, but we still practice magic today. This might be a bit of a stretch. I think we might have replaced magic with maxing.

You've heard this expression now? Looks maxing. Fiber maxing. Protein maxing. You know, a lot of people take the word something and throw it in front of maxing.

It's fine to want to be healthy and things like that. But if you think about how it functions in our society, it's almost like it's fulfilling a similar need to be in control, to be seen as beautiful, to be seen as healthy, to be optimized, to be in control of my future.

But we can't just use Jesus' power as one option among many. When he gets into the heart of things, our hearts change, our priorities change. And that's our second disruption.

The gospel disrupts our priorities. Not just one option among others, but it's exclusive. Not just turning to new ways to try to life hack our way to security and to plenty, but trusting in Jesus alone.

[16:35] And this sets us up for our final disruption, a disruption of worldview. So we see how hearts have been disrupted, we see how priorities and power has been disrupted, and finally gets into a whole city.

And this takes us into verse 23 onward. So after the gospel has disrupted their hearts, it hits people where it really hurts. Their pocketbooks. Look at verse 25 here.

The reason it's disrupting their pocketbooks is because it disrupted their worldviews first. What do I mean by worldview? So worldview is how we view or interpret reality. It's like the glasses we put on to interpret everything we're seeing.

And it shows up in our everyday life. Our laws, our economies, our answers to the question of what is the good life. And behind these things are views about what it means to be human.

Behind answers to what it means to be human is our view of God. And behind our view of God is our view of the whole world. Why are we here? What is going on? So worldview is behind how we answer questions like are humans basically good or bad.

[17:42] You'll quickly discover someone's worldview by engaging them in that kind of conversation. So looking at verses 23 through 27 there's a guy named Demetrius. He has a clear financial interest.

I think he'd probably need to submit some kind of conflict of interest form or something like that. In the temple worship of Artemis. What's happening here is that people's hearts and priorities are changing. Their lifestyles change including their spending.

But something really telling happens here. Look at verse 25. Look at the first thing out of his mouth. It says, These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.

First thing out of his mouth. Isn't that interesting? It's only later that he starts talking about how great Artemis is and Artemis' reputation and wouldn't be so bad if the whole world thought less of Artemis.

He leaves where it hurts which is their wealth. Their pocketbooks. Business, wealth. That's his primary concern. That's his primary world view. Because he knows he's a maker of these things.

[18:44] He knows that the idols that he makes are nothing. We see it in his answer. But he can't work up a crowd based on his own financial position, right?

He does it instead based on crowd dynamics. The reputation of Artemis. National city identity. And now we see the whole city is in an uproar. Talk about disruptive. People are literally not even sure what they're yelling about.

I mean, several times it just says people show up and start yelling what's going on? I don't know, we're kind of angry about something. Well, I'll just join in for a while. I've got some time off of work. The whole place is chaotic.

So a Jewish person tries to speak but he's shouted down for two hours. It's like he was trying to make sure the Ephesians knew that Paul wasn't one of them. See, in Jewish circles, Jewish communities have protected status when they were out in the Roman world.

So Jews were often very concerned that anything that showed up as challenging the status quo, they wanted to make sure they weren't considered part of it. So they shout him down for two hours. It's like sitting through a World Cup game where people are shouting and chanting.

[19:49] Now that's only 90 minutes plus some if you get some bonus time. But when Paul tries to speak, he's prevented. And then a town clerk speaks up and settles the crowd. So while Paul is unable to make a public defense, we actually see that the gospel still emerges victorious in its last disruption.

And it's victorious because the gospel is subversive. What do I mean by subversive? Notice here, the city clerk makes a subtle defense of Christianity while he's defending Artemis.

He says in verse 37 that these men are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers. So if they have any actual accusation, they should take it to the court. And the crowd disperses.

So in this last disruption, this disruption of world views reminds us of a timeless lesson. First of all, we should expect a contrast of lifestyle.

We should expect Christians and our differences and who we follow as king will lead to a difference in lifestyle. And as Jesus works on our hearts and our priorities, it'll show up in that lifestyle.

[20:57] And this lifestyle is going to be disruptive to the world around us. Now before we moved out here as a family for 14 years, I worked at a Christian college in upstate New York, Houghton College.

And I was responsible for lots of different things, but in particular, marketing. How do we communicate the value of a Christian liberal arts education to 16 and 17 year olds? Which is a fun challenge.

And we had a consultant come in. She came from the business world. And she led us through all these amazing new tools she said that we should use to revolutionize our marketing. One of them was using this, I don't remember, it was like this surveys you would fill out.

They call it Claritas, but it used to be Nielsen's rating. You might get like a survey in the mail and you have to, they have to answer questions like what programs do you watch? Where do you like to eat out? At, you know, A&W; or this other place?

Well, with all this data, these companies would say you can hyper-target your marketing, right? You can say, oh, we know the people who like to eat at A&W; and drive Hondas tend to be the good fit at our school so we can target our marketing.

[22:01] Rather than spending \$100,000 in crazy ways, we can target it to specific ways. It all sounded amazing, almost too good to be true. Then I kind of paused for a second. I said, I asked this person, it's really interesting, but what about Christians though?

Like what, how should we accommodate how to market to Christians given this data? And she looked at me without any hesitation, and she's either Christian as well, and just said, oh, no difference. No difference.

You can market the same way to a Christian or to anybody else. And now that I'm thinking about it, that might have been one of the first few cracks in the foundation of my time there. I said, I think it might be time for me to move on.

Because I was deeply troubled by that. And I think we all should be. That a Christian's preferences and patterns and lifestyles and spending should be in contrast to the rest of the world.

But I'll tell you about a better marketing campaign that I liked. I was walking through our campus center. It was around this time of, actually a couple of weeks before now, when students are looking for summer jobs. So we had a summer fair going on, different booths set up, Christian camps, things like that.

[23 : 11] And I'll remember this to this day. It stopped me in my tracks, and I had to walk over there. I walked by one of the trifolds. I usually don't stop for these kinds of things. And one of the trifolds said, wreck your life.

Wreck your life. They're like, well, this I gotta see. So I walked over, and I looked at it and said, well, what's this about? Wrecked your life. And it was about working at a summer camp, as many of our youth are doing. And it said, the pay will be terrible.

It will not look good on your resume. Transferable skills. I mean, maybe conflict management. I don't know. How to work with kids. But this is not about building a career for future advancement. This is about serving Jesus in a particular way. So always remember that. Wreck your life. And to many, that's what it looks like Christians are doing. Right?

We're wrecking our lives by following this Jesus. We're burning our books. All that money wasted. But one commentator put it this way.

[24 : 16] Sometimes as Christians, we're prone to think maybe we should stand on some sort of pulpit, be polemical, argue against people. This commentator said it this way. Allow the differences in lifestyle to speak for itself.

And then trust in God's protection in the midst of our testimony. Allow the lifestyle to speak for itself and trust in God's protection in the midst of the testimony. So as we wrap up in Acts 19, we've seen the gospel start small in the hearts of a few people who get to see the full picture of who Jesus is. Now this inevitably has implications for the whole way of life, their whole city, their priorities and worldviews. And notice one feature as we close. Twice in our passage, what eventually we refer to as Christianity is called the way.

It's the word for road or way of life. So now that we see the disruptive power of the gospel, it makes sense that Luke calls it this.

This path of salvation in Christ is not just a set of opinions. It becomes a way of life. Our hearts change, our priorities change, our habits change, our communities change, and it's the Holy Spirit working in and through us.

[25 : 36] friends, this way is disruptive. So let's pray for the imagination and confidence to allow the Holy Spirit to do its disruptive work in us and through us.

First in our hearts, in our priorities, and in our worldviews. Amen. Thank you.