

39b ACTS

We resume our study now in the book of Acts, chapter 19. Having seen these, what are called the seven sons of Sceva, the Jewish chief priest, but I think once again that they were just vessels, they were crackpots, if you will. Jesus I know, Paul I'm aware of, who are you? The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them and prevailed against them, it says, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus. Once again you have that word all, meaning this was ubiquitous information. I'm sure if you looked hard you probably found somebody that had heard it, but it was common knowledge throughout Ephesus.

And fear fell on them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Notice the apostle Paul was completely uninvolved in this episode. This is something that God allowed to happen.

God works all things together for good to those who love him. God will be glorified, God will accomplish his purposes both by fair means and by foul. The evil things and the fallen things of this world still are caused to work together for good.

And the ministry of Paul is greatly enhanced in terms of its effectiveness and credibility by this episode that Paul has nothing to do with. It's completely out of his control. God orchestrates this.

God puts the pieces of the puzzle in place. These seven men were allowed to operate and allowed to have a measure of success. God bided his time until he could use them for his own purpose and in the interest of his own glory.

And it's something for us to remember. We sometimes look and we see the charlatans and we see the con men and we see people who seem to be getting away with things and getting over, beating the system, ill-gotten gain of whatever sort. You can see people cheat in school and seemingly get good grades.

You can see people not do the work and get by and get over and get around and get through. The world is full of evil. But God is the one who establishes his throne upon the seas.

The seas, the chaotic, uncontrollable waves and waters that cast up mire and dirt. God establishes his throne upon the seas, it tells us. He is master and Lord over those and nothing escapes his notice.

Nothing happens outside of his will. And so when we see the prevalence of evil, when we see the seeming victories of bad men, we should place our trust in God, bide our time and watch for him to level the scales. That's what happens here.

And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. They counted up the value of them and it totaled 50,000 pieces of silver.

So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. Why do you think they put a sort of a dollar value on all of these books that were burned? Well, Ephesus was a center for this kind of thing. And many people were horrified when these books were brought together and burned.

The people who were not converted and the people who were not impressed thought this is horrible. This is like the looting of the museum in Baghdad. Oh my, look at the value that has been destroyed because someone didn't pry these manuscripts away from these people when they got converted to be Christians.

Those are valuable books. Why? There's an industry in selling those books here in Ephesus and there's all that good merchandise going to waste. Remember books were scarce and expensive because they were scrolls.

They were hand copied. There were no printing presses. You didn't go down to the store and find shelf after shelf of identical books.

They had to be copied out one at a time. For someone to gather these and burn them was astonishing. It was stunning and to many of the pagans it was just horribly wasteful.

You could imagine if we saw someone gather together a bunch of Bibles and burn them. Well, this was worse in the sense of value because the Bible is the most printed book in history. There are more copies of the Bible than any other book ever.

These were sort of valuable and one of a kind and so on. So the value was substantial even though we don't know exactly what it was in today's currency. The word silver coin here is probably the drachma which was probably worth maybe 50 cents in today's money.

It's hard to know exactly what but if they were 50 cent pieces that would be \$25,000 worth of books. This was a substantially expensive bonfire. If somebody handed you \$25,000 I seriously doubt you would light it on fire.

But that's what happened. So the word of the Lord grew in power and prevailed. When these things were accomplished, as I said, it put a lot of people into shock because this was one of the main industries in Ephesus was the trafficking in magic and exorcism and things of pagan spirituality.

Paul purposed in the spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem saying after I have been there I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself

stayed in Asia for a time. About that time there arose a great commotion about the way.

A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation and said, Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but throughout almost all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people.

Notice it said all Asia heard the word. And he says almost all Asia Paul has persuaded and turned away many people saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed whom all Asia and the world worship.

Now there is a whole cult of Diana. We could go into Artemis, great as Artemis of the Ephesians or Diana. She is known by both names.

And the whole idea that there was a meteorite that fell and that this was the basis for the temple and the place where this worship was set up. Well, essentially this is the city's identity. This is their big claim to fame.

You can think of different towns that have their major claim to fame. St. Louis has its arch. Washington D.C. has the capital and the White House and the Washington Monument.

You've got the Needle up there in Seattle. Different cities have their sort of signature trademark thing. Rome has the Colosseum.

Well, you can imagine if somebody came in and made your tourist attraction anathema and something that people despised and didn't want to see anymore, all of the souvenir sellers and all of the people who have their commerce tied to this begin to lose money. Dallas here has the Sixth Floor Museum or whatever it is down here. Who's it shot the president? And that's one of the largest tourist attractions in this region.

Hundreds of thousands of people go through that place every year. And there's a great trade in books and postcards and all that. Well, that's what these men do.

These old silver shrines and other little artifacts and souvenirs. All the Greek-speaking world knew of Diana of the Ephesians and wanted a little memento and a souvenir and a little keepsake. Well, this all began to fall off when everybody turned into Christians and nobody wanted them idle anymore or a Diana keepsake.

So all of these guys get whipped into a ladder and they are full of wrath and they cry out saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians! And they kind of start a war whoop and a chant. And they begin to say this over and over. They keep on saying here in verse 28, Great is

Diana of the Ephesians! And the idea here is this present active participle is they were saying over and over.

It just kept coming out. Great is Diana of the Ephesians! If you've ever seen a sort of a mob scene or a demonstration where people are chanting and there's no reasoning with them. They're saying boo on the big guy or whatever.

They're down there saying boo on the big guy. And you come down there and say, wait a minute. The big guy is pretty nice.

And they just get up in your face. Boo on the big guy! They're not even thinking. They're just chanting.

They're in this mode where it's all emotion and it's all reaction. And sort of a mob herd instinct takes over. And there's just no reasoning with them.

So they're full of wrath and they're crying out over and over saying Great is Diana of the Ephesians! The whole city was filled with confusion and rushed into the theater with one accord. Now notice, once again, verse 29. I don't mean to beat this point into the ground, but I'm going to anyway.

The whole city was filled with confusion. The whole city rushed into the theater with one accord. Now obviously, there are Christians in the city who are not going to rush into the theater with one accord, seizing Gaius and Erascarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.

So Paul, evidently someone heard the noise and his little informal secret service kind of hid him in the back room. And the front men who were out there answering the door, they just grabbed them and hauled them down. So Gaius and Erascarchus were outside and they had Paul safely ensconced inside.

Well, the crowd didn't see Paul, but they saw these guys and just seized them and dragged them down to the theater. Paul wanted to go down to the people and speak up, but the disciples would not allow him. You can imagine the kind of conflict this might cause.

Here's the apostle of Christ saying, I want to go down to the theater. And you say, oh no, we're not letting you go. And you wonder what the back and forth was.

Hey, who's the apostle here anyway? I say I want to go. You guys let me go. And they say, we're not letting you go.

I've already seen you get stoned and beat up and whipped three or four times and imprisoned and chained. And if you go down there, they'll tear you limb from limb. Well, evidently he listened to reason because he allowed himself to be restrained.

So some of the officials of Asia who were his friends sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. So even some of the government people said, if Paul comes down here, we can't restrain the people. It's too violent.

It's too ugly. These people are mindless. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

This is the problem with emotion. It can't think. It can't reason.

People get swept up in the moment. You see this on television periodically. Every five or six years, we have some kind of a big riot somewhere.

In my childhood, early teenage years, we had the Watts riots down in Los Angeles. There was rioting on school campuses during the Vietnam War. There were race riots in the 60s that we used to see on television.

The Watts riots were the most glaring example. And when they would stick cameras in that environment and try to take pictures and try to talk to people, put a microphone in their face, they're irrational. You can't get any sense out of them.

There's no talking. There's no reasoning. There's no common sense.

They are just in a mad rush. Do we ever feel this way? Do we ever get caught up in the moment, caught up because of the injustice of our situation or our anger in a situation, our impatience or frustration in a situation, and we just lose our head? We lose our cool. We lose our self-control.

The fruit of the Spirit, if you think about that list, where do we find the fruit of the Spirit? What book? What the fruit of the Spirit is? It's where? That's the love chapter. Remember Galatians 6, 7, and 8? Against such there is no law. But if you look at that list, actually Galatians 6, 7, and 8 is Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.

It's 522 is the fruit of the Spirit. Thanks. But when you look at that list, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, it's chiastic in structure.

The outermost elements tend to be the most important. You start with love, and the other bracket is self-control. Love without self-control is valueless.

If you are loved by someone who has no self-control, their love can be a burden and a curse instead of a blessing. Love has to be balanced by self-control. Joy has to be balanced with gentleness.

Peace has to be balanced with faithfulness. Long-suffering has to be balanced with goodness. And right in the very center of that, you have kindness.

Kindness. That word is Christotes. C-H-R-E-S-T-O-T-E-S.

And Christotes is the word that means uprightness, beneficial goodness, kindness, or generosity. So you have love as the left bracket. You have Christotes, upright kindness.

Kindness based on righteousness in the middle. And you have self-control at the end. It's a beautifully structured list, very carefully designed and crafted by the Holy Spirit to teach us the importance of our goodness being circumscribed by righteousness and controlled all under the operation of self-control.

So this mob is out of control. Righteousness is out the window. This is not love.

It is hate. It is not joy. It is a mad rush.

There is no peace. They are not patient. They're certainly not kind.

They are not good. There is no faithfulness. They think they're being faithful to Diana, but a lot of them don't even know why they're there.

So once they arrive down at the theater, they are confused. They don't know why they are there. And in verse 33, they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews, putting him forward.

Alexander motioned with his hand and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Now this is a mindless rabble chanting for two solid hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians, as though by chanting you can make it so.

All of this began with a malice of forethought. The craftsmen, the silversmiths, they said we're losing money. And so they whipped the mindless crowd into a froth.

The temple in Ephesus honored the great goddess Artemis or Diana. And it was the big visitor's attraction, tourist attraction. But they don't say great is the temple of Artemis or great is the temple of Diana.

They appeal to the goddess herself. This Alexander, we don't know exactly who he was. He is mentioned elsewhere.

He could be Alexander the metal worker of 2 Timothy 4.14. Alexander the coppersmith. Paul says in 2 Timothy that he did me much harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

There was also an Alexander in 1 Timothy 1.19 and 20. When he's talking about keeping faith and a good conscience, Paul says some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander whom I have handed over to Satan so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

So whether this man is one of these Alexanders, whether they are all three one man or there are two or three separate Alexanders is really hard at this historic distance to ascertain. The name Alexander was common in the ancient world. Most people think these were probably three separate Alexanders because the name was kind of like John or Bill.

It was very common. But this Alexander is completely ineffectual. He motions for the people to be silent but they say, wait, that's Alexander the Jew and then they just boo him down.

He doesn't ever say anything. So the city clerk finally quiets the crowd and he says, Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana and of the image which fell down from Zeus? This is a reference to the meteorite. Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.

For you have brought these men here who are not robbers of temples nor are they blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open. There are proconsuls.

Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. We are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.

When he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. You get the idea that after two hours of chanting, they were all kind of tired and they're finally depleted enough that he can inject some sort of reason into the discussion. But this uproar is significant in the sense that it tells Paul that after having been in Ephesus for these years, it's time to move on.

So after the uproar had ceased, and I think, and again, this is just my surmise, and I could easily be wrong, but remember what Paul said earlier, verse 21, when there was great success in Ephesus, the books came and were burned, and the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. Then Paul purposed in the Spirit, capital S, to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem. After I have been there, I must see Rome.

And he sends an advance team into Macedonia, Timothy and Erastus, to prepare the way for this journey, to kind of make arrangements and get people ready for him, lay out his itinerary. Where is he going to stay? How long will he be? This plan is underway. But, look at the last part of verse 22.

He sends Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. He couldn't quite bring himself to leave Ephesus. It was time to go.

He purposed in the Spirit. It was time to go make this trip. And he dallyed.

He didn't get up and go. Spirit told him it was time to go. His advance team had made the preparations, and he was late leaving.

I think he should have gone, and all of this wouldn't have happened. But he didn't go. There is a time to carpe diem, seize the day.

God the Holy Spirit will minister the Word of God to our souls when we look at a situation, and there is a time to take an action. Only we can decide it for ourselves. You can't respond to pressure from other people.

We ourselves have the Spirit. We have the Word of God. We are at the helm of our own ship, and God the Holy Spirit will make it clear when we are supposed to make a move or head in a direction, make a decision, marry a person, go to a school, change directions in some way.

It will be evident. We talked about divine guidance before. It is not magic.

It's not impulses. It's not spooky. It's not some sort of weird prompting.

It is practical. It is the application of propositional truth from the Word of God to our options. We look at our options, and we say, this is an option that best reflects my priority of pleasing the Lord God and fulfilling my duties and my responsibilities to the best of my abilities in the light of the Word of God.

This seems to be best. If we have a few options and we can't choose between them, we keep thinking our way through. God the Holy Spirit will make it clear.

Sometimes we don't see which way to go because it's not time for us to go anywhere yet. But when it's time to go, God the Holy Spirit will make it clear. That's what happened with Paul.

God said, you know Paul, you've accomplished what I sent you to Ephesus to do. Now it's time to go through Macedonia and Achaia and head on beyond that. What's interesting is that he didn't go.

And so then this rabble gets roused, and God pretty much compels him to leave because suddenly there's a great anti-Christian sentiment. And so it takes this big riot to finally blast Paul out of his complacency. He's been there a little too long, got a little too comfortable, isn't really ready to leave.

This is my impression. So after the uproar in chapter 20, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. So you can see that the upshot of this whole thing is that he does finally leave.

What we would like to do is learn to respond to God's leading and God's direction without having to be kicked in the pants. And this is sort of a boot in the rear end for Paul to get him on out of Ephesus. By the way, it is during this time in Ephesus, I think I mentioned last time, that he writes the Corinthian letters back to the town he has just come from, and a great amount of his epistolary output takes place during this time.

Paul called the disciples, departed to go to Macedonia. When he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. When the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, remember Syria, that's Antioch, that's Jerusalem, that's home, he decided to return through Macedonia.

So he was going to head that way, and now he's turned and gone the other way. Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia. Also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians and Gaius of Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trofimus of Asia.

You'll recognize Tychicus and Timothy and some of these other names. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. And now, once again, Luke has joined the team because as he's going back through Macedonia, he's going to come back by the house of Lydia.

I personally sort of guess that Lydia and Luke may have gotten married. I think Lydia was unmarried at the time that they showed up, and when the team left, Luke stayed behind. And now when Paul comes back through, this is a couple of years later, and Luke is ready to accompany him on a journey.

So it's at least within the realm of possibility, in my mind, that Luke stayed behind because he had acquired a wife in Lydia, just to guess. So, we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Well, we'll examine the first part of this next phase of Paul's travels next time, but what do we glean from these happenings? We don't get the content of Paul's preaching and teaching here, do we? We have a lot of circumstances that swirl around him and a lot of pressures that are on the outside.

This is typically what happens to us. Most of our day, we don't spend thinking about deep doctrinal truth, do we? Most of the time, we spend coping with tasks and duties and things that need to be done, and we go from one thing to the next, and sometimes it's difficult to remember who we are and why we're here. But there are critical moments.

God does not expect us to think theology all day long. He doesn't expect us to constantly be praying and quoting verses to ourselves. He put us in a practical world that requires concentration, requires hard work, requires attention to detail where we focus on the task at hand.

But there has to be a sticking our nose above water. We have to pause from time to time and make sure that we do not get so absorbed that we forget who we are and why we're here. There ought to be periodic times where we pause.

How do we do this? I think the Bible suggests to us three times in a day when we should consciously and particularly stop what we're doing and pay attention to our spiritual identity and our spiritual priorities. The psalmist says, evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and he shall hear my voice. What do we know about Daniel's habits, the prophet Daniel, when he was in Babylon? How many times a day did he stop and pray? Three times a day.

Evening, morning and noon. In the Hebrew mind, those are in order. Evening is the beginning of the day.

Morning is the middle of the day. And noon is toward the latter part of the day because the Jewish day ends at sundown, right? So these are spaced so that at the times when we can take a break, evening is a good time before retiring. They used to retire when the sun went down unless they wanted to waste a lot of money on candles and lamp oil.

They would retire early and then wake in the morning. So before retiring, upon arising in the morning and in the middle of the twelve hours of daylight, they would stop and go to the Lord, meditate on the things of God, communicate with Him and let Him communicate with us is the idea. So I think at a minimum, if we stop at three times in the day and make a genuine effort at two-way communication with God.

The thing that's striking about Psalm 55, 17 is He says, Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and what? Talk to myself? Whisper in a corner? I will pray and cry aloud and He will hear my voice. It doesn't say He will hear my thoughts. He will hear my voice.

The government officials who got Daniel in trouble were able to do it because Daniel wasn't just sitting there staring off into space. He spoke his prayers. He spoke out loud.

I'm not saying we have to pray out loud, but if you look in the Bible, it is quite significant to see the number of times that you find people praying aloud. The Lord Jesus in the garden prayed aloud. The Lord Jesus on the cross prayed aloud.

The Lord Jesus in front of His disciples prayed aloud. The Lord Jesus breaking bread and blessing it prayed aloud. There is something about spoken prayer that focuses our mind, forces us to complete a thought.

It's pretty hard to have your mind wander away if you're speaking out loud. If you're thinking your prayer, the next thing you know, you're thinking about what's going to happen tomorrow and what happened today. You know how it is.

Mental prayers, your mind tends to wander down the primrose path. But if you're praying

out loud, of course, some people think that happens. You know, you ask somebody to pray on behalf of a group and it's a real long, flowery prayer.

We don't have that problem here, but I've been in churches where somebody would stand up and say, Brother Ed, would you close us in a word of prayer? Brother Ed throws in everything but the kitchen sink and 12 minutes later, you're hopping from one foot to another wondering if the prayer is ever going to end. But there is something about speaking aloud, and I just point that out. You can see it for yourself in Scripture.

So, again, what do we glean from this? It's important for us to remember who we are and why we're here. Not become complacent. It seems as though the Apostle Paul, even though he was engaged in the work of the Lord, forgot one of the crucial aspects of being an apostle, which is one who is sent forth, is to keep moving.

After you've accomplished a purpose in one place, it may be time to move to another, in his case. And God will direct us. God will give us options and opportunities.

And when they are there, and when the Spirit identifies them for us, and through the application of the Word of God makes it clear that this is a decision to make, this is an action to take, this is a direction to move in, we need to not wait, to not dally, but take the initiative and go ahead and do it. So that's one application. A second one is to see the working of God in circumstances.

Much of what we see in Acts chapter 19 is completely outside the Apostle's control. What the crowds do, what the exorcists do, what the silversmith does, what the tradesmen do, what the mob does, what the government officials do, is all environment. It is the milieu in which Paul moves.

But God is still in control. And God orchestrates and manages those situations so that His people wind up in the right place at the right time, ready to do God's work. So we should not be discouraged.

We shouldn't become worried or upset or destabilized by things that happen around us. I still believe that we're in for another major terrorist attack sometime soon. I think our people are hard at work.

I imagine they have probably foiled several of them already. But sooner or later, the Islamic extremists are going to upset the apple cart again like they did on 9-11. And when they do, we should not be disturbed in mind or lose our peace or lose our focus.

These things happen all within the preview of the Lord God. And it is up to us to maintain our focus, maintain our objective, which is to bear the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, righteous kindness, faith, meekness, temperance, all of the things in the list. Well, this brings us to chapter 20 in Acts.

This is where we'll pick up next time. We're going to see a new phase in the ministry of Paul. And we're going to learn a little bit about these individuals who go ahead and are a part of the missionary team.

And we'll continue our study of Acts next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your Word and the great truths that are communicated to us through these narratives and through the example of the Apostle Paul.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, help us to see the application of principle and of doctrine to our own lives and our own decision-making. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We pray it in his name, amen.