



Central Peninsula Church

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No Small Disturbance

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

It's interesting how often our society is fine with religion so long as it doesn't overstep its bounds. "Religion is fine," we hear, "kept in its place." It's like, there is the world of religion and there is the real world of practical, no-nonsense living and we need to keep these things separate. But followers of Christ haven't always been content to divide up our lives along those lines.

This becomes an issue when power and politics are involved. Take the upcoming election. People say, "Faith is fine, but don't let it dictate how you vote. That could be dangerous. What about the separation of church and state?" Obviously, many disagree because like it or not faith is once again an issue in this year's election.

And then there are the Christians who want to go to Cuba because the church there is growing like wildfire and very much in need of teaching and encouragement. But Christians are being discouraged by the American government from going to Cuba because they don't want us pouring our money into the Cuban economy. "Religion is okay," they say, "but American foreign policy comes first."

Sometimes the issue isn't really politics but money. When William Wilberforce decided that slavery was an evil institution that needed to be abolished people got real mad. The entire economy depended on the slave trade. And, today, we have a similar issue. One of the reasons people get upset when we take a stand against abortion is the abortion industry generates a great deal of money for a lot of people. "Religion is okay," they say, "but when it infringes on my ability to make a buck, it's gone too far."

This morning we're going to see how it is that the Gospel clashes with and ultimately overcomes the vested interests of society. In Acts 19, Luke narrates how the gospel reached and affected an entire city, and even its surrounding province, through a relatively small group of Christians. Ephesus was located in a strategic place. It was known as the "Treasure House of Asia" because it commanded all the trade into the river valley of the rich province of Asia Minor. It was a port city and a prosperous center of trade and commerce.

It was also the site of the Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Its 127 marble pillars were inlaid with gold and rare gems. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide and 60 feet high. Displayed inside was the pride of Ephesus — the multi-breasted carved image of Artemis, which was

thought to have fallen from the heavens. Artemis was a fertility goddess so ritual prostitution was practiced in the temple. The city also became a center for witchcraft, a watering hole for magicians and others who practiced the black arts.

So it was to this city that Paul came and there assaulted the strongholds of evil and ultimately turned that city upside down. The question is, how did it happen? How did Paul and his friends tear down these strongholds of evil? We ask that question not because we're history buffs but so we can learn how we can do the same kind of thing today.

I. Persuasion: The truth of the Gospel is persuasively taught.

The first thing is something we touched on last week. Let's call it "persuasion." We saw last week that when Paul came to Ephesus he started by teaching in the synagogue and then after three months he could see he was banging his head against the wall. So he rented out a lecture hall in the school of Tyrannus where he taught five hours a day, presumably six days a week, for two years. That, by the way, amounts to over 3,000 hours of instruction, which is more than an average college student will get in earning a university degree. Luke says in v.8 that Paul was "**reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.**" And then in v.10 he says, "**he was reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.**" And then later in v.26, Demetrius, who stood in opposition to Paul, paid him a great compliment when he confessed, "**this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made of hands are no gods at all.**"

Increasingly, people are realizing that persuasion is becoming a lost art in our society. Listen to what Matt Miller wrote in a column in the *NY Times*:

Is persuasion dead? And if so, does it matter? Is it possible in America today to convince anyone of anything he doesn't already believe? If so, are there enough places where this mingling of minds occurs to sustain a democracy? The signs are not good. Ninety percent of political conversation amounts to dueling "talking points." Best-selling books reinforce what folks thought when they bought them. Talk radio and opinion journals preach to the converted. Let's face it: the purpose of most political speech is not to persuade but to

win, be it power, ratings, celebrity or even cash. By contrast, marshaling a case to persuade those who start from a different position is a lost art. Honoring what's right in the other side's argument seems a superfluous thing that can only cause trouble... Politicos huddle with like-minded souls in opinion cocoons that seem impervious to facts. The politicians and the press didn't kill off persuasion intentionally, of course; it's more manslaughter than murder. Persuasion just isn't relevant to delivering elections or eyeballs. Polls have figured out that to get votes you don't need to change minds. Even when they want to, modern media makes it hard. They give officials seconds to make their point, ignore their ideas in favor of their poll numbers or showcase a clash of caricatures, believing this is the only way to make "debate" entertaining. Elections may turn on emotions like hope and fear anyway, but with persuasion's passing, there's no alternative.

I have to tell you, I think he's right. And I don't bemoan this as so much for what it does in the realm of politics as in the realm of faith. Are people becoming Christians today because of emotion or because of reasoned and persuasive arguments? Does anyone care whether or not something is true, or do we just care about if it works and makes us feel better? Would Paul's method of careful reasoning and persuading have been viable today? Would anyone have listened for more than a sound bite? Could this be why the faith of many is a mile wide but an inch deep? These are good questions to ask and I for one would like to see us pay more attention to Paul's method of evangelism. I'd like to see us in university classrooms and high tech board rooms and backyard bible studies actually reasoning and persuading people about the kingdom of God, namely that Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom through his death and resurrection, conquering the powers of sin, death and the devil, and now he reigns from heaven over his people and will one day return to rule over a new heaven and a new earth.

II. Conversion: People put their faith in Christ.

The second thing that takes place comes as a direct result of the first, and that is conversion. People in Ephesus put their faith in Christ, turning away from idols to the true and living God. We saw this last week among a group we called "almost Christians"—disciples of John with an incomplete knowledge of the saving work of Christ. Paul filled them in and they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And then we saw this in those who formerly were involved in magic and sorcery. Luke says in v.18 **"Many of those who also had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices..."** Many of them even brought their very costly books of charms and incantations and burned them. This is visible

and tangible proof of their repentance and faith in Christ. If we're going to make an impact it will start very simply with people being converted in this way.

III. Discipleship: Believers live out their new life in the real world.

But it would be foolish for us to think that the change that took place in their lives stopped there. No, this was only the beginning. There is this thing called discipleship which is about following Jesus day in and day out. These new believers in Ephesus had only started on a journey. It wasn't just about burning up a few books; they would have to deal with things like selfishness and pride, greed and lust. Those things don't burn up quite so easily, do they? And then they would have to learn to live out their faith in the midst of a pagan world. What will following Jesus mean for my job? How will it alter the kinds of things I laugh about around the water cooler? What will following Jesus mean in my family? How will it change the kind of husband or wife that I am? How will it change the way I parent or deal with my aging parents? How will it impact what I spent my money on?

So one day Mr. Arelius is sitting in the family room reading the Ephesian Post Tribune and he calls to Mrs. Arelius in the kitchen, "Honey, have you picked up Lydia's graduation present yet? I noticed on the way home from work that there is a wonderful sale. You can't find such quality statues of Artemis in all of Ephesus! Made of pure silver!"

Mrs. Arelius says from the kitchen, "Honey, I've decided not to get her that for graduation. I want to get her a book instead."

Mr. Arelius says, "A book? We can't get her a book. Everyone gets their child an image of Artemis for graduation. I got one for my graduation 20 years ago!"

Mrs. Arelius calls back, "But, honey, we no longer worship Artemis. Remember what Paul said? He said there is one God and he is immortal and invisible. He said we're to serve the Lord Jesus and no other. Jesus said "'I am the Way.' Not 'one of the ways,' but 'THE Way!'"

"But, honey, what will the neighbors say? I mean, this is our way of life. We can't turn our backs on everything. I think you're being a bit extreme. And what if everyone did that? What would happen to our city, our culture? What would happen to our economy? Do you know how much money those little silver statues generate for our economy? My brother works for a silversmith. He could lose his job!"

These are the kinds of conversations people have when they become followers of Christ. This is what happens because Jesus called us to a life of discipleship.

IV. Opposition: The world reacts in opposition to believers.

This brings us to the next thing that happens when

the gospel begins to take root: opposition, what Luke calls in v.23, **“no small disturbance.”** Look at vv.23-25a. **“About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades,...”** It starts with the local union of silversmiths and their boss, Demetrius. Demetrius has noticed that the receipts have plummeted ever since this guy Paul took up shop in the school of Tyrannus. People would come from all over Asia and buy these little silver statues of Artemis and then take them to the temple and offer them as part of their worship, or sometimes just take them home and put them on their mantle as a souvenir of their visit. Now they aren't buying statues; they're buying crosses! Business had never been worse. He might have to lay off some of the craftsmen.

So Demetrius gets them all together to address this issue. Look what he says. **“...and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.’ When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’”** (vv.25b–28). He's a smart guy. He starts out and just talks about the bottom line. He knows that this is what matters most to these craftsmen. He does manage to mix a little bit of religion and civic pride in and they get real fired up and begin to chant, **“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”**

And then multitudes start pouring down the Arcadian Way. This beautiful boulevard ran straight through the city, connecting the harbor with the great amphitheater that seated almost 25,000 people. The mob probably couldn't find Paul, so they swept up his two friends and dragged them to the theater. Look at vv.29-34. **“The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, ‘Great is Artemis of the**

Ephesians!”

The mob is in a frenzy, totally beyond reason chanting. Confusion reigns. I think with a note of humor Luke says most of them didn't even know why they were there! Have you ever been in a mob or a riot, or seer one? People do things as a group that they would never do as individuals. I went to a 49er game about a month ago on a Sunday night, and it was like this. It was crazy Fights broke out. People chanting. My son and I tried to get something to eat at half-time and it was like we were taking our life into our hands. We gave up! Many of the people were intoxicated out of their minds. Some had Bengal jerseys; others had Niner jerseys. The 49er's actually won the game but no one seemed to care; it was just one big confused mob! But we had a great time!

Notice Paul wants to rescue his friends, but the Christians in Ephesus prevented him from going. The mob would have killed him if he had gone in there. Ever the Asiarchs, who were kind of like the nobility of the city urged him not to venture into the crowd. It's interesting that Paul had made friends with these guys because one of their jobs was to promote the worship of the Roman Emperor. We don't know if some of them had become believers, but it shows us that Paul was making inroads into the upper classes and VIPs.

Notice also that a Jew named Alexander is put forward. I'm sure the Jews wanted to disassociate from the Christians because they could easily be lumped together with them since they didn't worship idols either. But when the crowd recognizes him as a Jew they get more hyped up and for two straight hours chant, **Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**

This is what happens when the gospel makes inroads into an idolatrous culture through even a minority of believers who have been persuaded that the gospel is true and seek to live that out in everyday discipleship. Sooner or later there will be a rub; a clashing of values.

A good example is Christmas. We just got done with this holiday where we supposedly celebrate the birth of Christ, but we all know that for most people it has become not much more than an idolatrous celebration of materialism. We all know how much our retail economy depends on Christmas. So what would happen if followers of Christ all over the country decided to change our spending practices at Christmas to be more in line with the priorities of the Gospel? Or what would happen if ordinary believers decided to stop watching certain TV programs or going to certain movies? But unfortunately most people in America who claim to be Christians see very little connection between their faith and the actual choices they make in the public square. And I would say if we do not see this clash of values anywhere in our lives then we have really ceased to be salt and light in the world.

V. Vindication: God allows his people to be vindicated.

The fifth and final thing I want you to see is “vindication.” Sometimes God steps in and vindicates his people. In Ephesus this came in a most unusual way through the town clerk. He was the executive officer of the civic assembly; a liaison between the civic government and the Romans. He had a vested interest in this because he would be held responsible for the riot and it could result in severe penalties on the city by Rome. Somehow he’s able to quiet the crowd long enough to talk some sense into them. Look what he says. **“After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, ‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven? So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.’ After saying this he dismissed the assembly”** (vv.35–41).

He makes three points. His first point is that they ought to keep calm and do nothing rash because everyone knows the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the Temple of Artemis. Everyone knows she fell down from heaven. In other words, “We don’t need to get overly excited because Diana’s fame is universally acknowledged. It will take a lot more than a few renegade Jews to bring her down!”

His second point is that these Christians are neither robbers of temples or blasphemers of Artemis. So now he defends Paul and his friends. This is VERY revealing because it appears Paul had not directly denounced Artemis in an smear campaign. It seems rather that Paul’s way was to simply teach the truth of the gospel and then let people put two and two together and figure out what all of this meant in relation to idols. Paul didn’t circulate a petition to rid the city of idol worship. He didn’t form a mass rally or a march to show their strength. He didn’t put an ad in the paper telling people that Artemis was a fraud. What did he do? We already saw what he did. He sat down, day after day for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus and reasoned and persuaded people about the kingdom of God. And people got it. The truth changed them.

His third point is that if Demetrius wants to bring a charge against them he ought to use the proper legal channels. As a matter of fact, they themselves were in

danger of being accused of a riot by the Roman authorities without any real justification. In other words, “We’re the ones breaking the law here, not Paul and his friends.” No doubt one of the things Luke wants his readers to know is that the Christian faith was not a political threat; that Christians were good citizens and that Paul was innocent of any rabble rousing.

Isn’t it wonderful how these believers never had to say a word through this whole thing, yet in the end they’re vindicated by a leader of the very people who are trying to harm them? We know that God doesn’t always allow things to end quite so calmly. Sometimes, as we’ve seen right here in the book of Acts, God allows his people to undergo imprisonment or beating or even death, yet here the storm dies down and everyone goes home.

CONCLUSION

But I want you to see how it is that the Gospel clashes with and ultimately overcomes the vested interests of society. I want you to see how strongholds of evil can be assaulted and ultimately turn a city upside down. How did it happen? How did Paul and his friends tear down these strongholds? It didn’t happen by a campaign of negativity and denunciation but by persuasion. It happens today as people come to faith in Christ and begin to put that faith into practice in a life of discipleship. This in turn will cause “no small disturbance.”

Let me tell you just one story to illustrate this. Jackson Senyonga is the pastor of the 40,000 member Christian Life Church in Kampala, Uganda. His father was murdered by Idi Amin and Jackson was literally thrown into a garbage dump to die at three months of age. Raised by relatives, he found Christ at 14 and a few years later he started a church in the slums of Kampala with six other people. In two weeks, there were 2,000 people attending, that was 21 years ago. Jackson now leads 600 pastors and leaders in the city of Kampala and coordinates strategic intercessory prayer throughout the nation. Just to share a little of what has been accomplished through teaching and prayer in Uganda:

- The crime rate has dropped approximately 70%.
- AIDS has dropped from 33.3% to 5% today.
- Prayers have been instituted in all levels of society, government, business, and churches.
- Laws are being rewritten to favor God’s principles and Word.
- First Lady Museveni prays publicly and encourages all sectors of government to hold morning and lunchtime prayer meetings.
- Members of parliament are meeting weekly for prayer.

All of that didn’t happen through some kind of political revolution; or through Christians staging mass rallies or signing petitions; it didn’t happen through the negative denunciation of personal sin or institutional evil,

but rather through the gospel changing people's lives. People who understand that you can't separate your faith from the way you vote, and what you spend money on, and what you do for fun, and every other aspect of your personal and their public life. The fact is, faith that does not impact every part of our lives is no faith at all.

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