

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week, we read that many people in Ephesus repented of their sins and chose to follow Jesus after they heard the gospel and saw the miracles that God was doing through Paul. **Acts 19:19** told us, **“A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.”** Those scrolls of secret magic had been valued at 50,000 silver coins, but now those who had believed in Jesus counted them as worthless. This public repentance must have had an impact on many people. In addition to encouraging others to repent, this event might even have hurt the profits of shops dealing in such scrolls.

When there is public repentance from the things that are detestable in God’s sight, the church grows rapidly. At the same time, opposition to the gospel also grows. This happened in Ephesus. Let’s read Acts 19:23-41.

II. Scripture Reading

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. 24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. 25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. 32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. 33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

III. Teaching

Acts 19:23, “About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.” In the early days of the church, it was often referred to simply as,



“the Way.” This is a powerful name for the church since it evokes the ideas of the way of salvation and the way of Christ, and contrasts the way of faith with the many false ways of the world. Many churches still use this name, for example, The Way Community Church in Alabama, USA.

Many people in Ephesus were joining the Way, but soon opposition came. The key person opposing the Way was named Demetrius. **Acts 19:24** introduces him saying, **“A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.”** Demetrius made Artemis shrines and brought in, “no little business,” in other words, a lot of business for other craftsman as well.

Artemis, who was called Diana by the Romans, was originally the Greek goddess of the hunt, but she later she became known as a goddess of fertility, especially in Ephesus. Today, there is almost nothing left of her temple. Here is a photo of the site. It doesn't look like much anymore, but at one time there was a magnificent temple here. The temple was counted as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.



Here is a 1/25th scale model of the Temple of Artemis as it appeared at that time. The temple was the focal point of a month-long festival held in May of each year. The festival was very famous and people would travel hundreds of miles to go to the festival and visit the temple. Naturally, this brought a great deal of money to the businesses in Ephesus. Furthermore, in addition to being a religious center, the temple also served as a major regional bank. Wealthy people and even city governments deposited funds at the temple bank.



The object of worship at the temple was a statue of Artemis that was said to have fallen from the sky; some say that perhaps it was made from a meteorite. The original statue was lost, but this photo shows a typical Artemis of Ephesus statue. The people of Ephesus loved their temple and their goddess. In **Acts 19:34b**, when the riot occurred, we are told that, **“they all shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’”**



Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen made their living by selling portable shrines and figures of Artemis so that people leaving the festival could take a little statue of the goddess home. But the success of Paul's preaching was hurting their business. So Demetrius called the people in this business together. Demetrius said, (**Acts 19:25b-26**), **“Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.”**



Demetrius goes on to explain that Paul's teaching could lead to the Temple of Artemis being discredited and that Artemis could be, “robbed of her divine majesty.” Demetrius wanted Paul and the church stopped and he knew how to get the people on his side. Demetrius' speech basically argued that they would lose their jobs, their city pride, and their goddess if Paul was not stopped, because, **“He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.”**

Let's think about that. The Bible teaches us that the true God is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth. But idol worship tells us that man can make his own gods. However, if the thing a man makes is called a god, then the man must be an even greater god. So, we see that the root of idol worship is pride and self-worship. The Bible condemns idol worship as foolishness and sin.

In **Isaiah 44:9-20**, we are taught:

9 All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. 10 Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? 11 He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are

nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy. 12 The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. 13 The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. 14 He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. 15 It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. 16 Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." 17 From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god." 18 They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. 19 No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" 20 He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

Where is the problem of idol worship? It is in the heart; **“a deluded heart,”** worships idols. The people who go to the temples and shrines and bow before idols may be gentle and peaceful. By the standards of society, many are good people. But their hearts are deluded. What they worship is a lie, fashioned by a clever workman. The maker of idols might believe that what he is doing is right. Or, like Demetrius at Ephesus, it might just be a way to make a living. But in the end, if you worship a thing that is made by man, then you are really glorifying man and not God.

In Ephesus, the making and selling of idols was big business. It is also big business in Japan and many other countries. So far we have been talking about idols that are statues or images of false gods. Bowing down and praying before statues is the most obvious form of idol worship. But it is not the only kind of idol worship. Money, power, sex, and fame can be idols in our lives. Philosophies or lifestyles can also be idols. People who we admire too much can become idols to us. Even the ministry of the church can become an idol when we place church work above worshipping God.

J.D. Greear, a Christian author and the pastor at the Summit Church in North Carolina, USA, put it this way, *“When something becomes so important to you that it drives your behavior and commands your emotions, you are worshipping it.”* We all need to examine ourselves. What drives our behavior and commands our emotions? If we place God first in our heart and seek to follow Jesus in all areas of life, then we are worshipping God. But if we are driven and commanded by something else, whatever it is, then we are being led astray into idol worship.

It is easy for us to look down on Demetrius, the silversmith who made Artemis shrines and who was willing to start a riot in order to protect his business of making idols. But the truth is, we are very much like Demetrius. The devil and his demons work to deceive us. But even apart from their schemes, we are fallen human beings living in a fallen world. As the early Protestant leader, John Calvin, put it, *“Every one of us is, even from his mother's womb, a master craftsman of idols.”*

We need to examine ourselves regularly so that we can guard our hearts against idol worship. But often we are blind to our own idol worship; a deluded heart is blind to its own error. So we need help from the One who sees our hearts most clearly. David set an example for us in **Psalm 139:23-24**, David prayed, **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”** I pray that with the help of the Lord we will all be able to recognize the idols in our lives for as lies and deceptions and that the Lord will give us the courage and wisdom to turn away from every false god.

Let's get back to our Bible passage. **Acts 19: 28-29** tells us what happened when Demetrius finished his speech against Paul. **“When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great**

is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater."

Apparently they did not know where Paul was, so they seized some of his fellow gospel workers. Their shouting brought more and more people and the whole city was in an uproar and they all headed for the theater. The theater was a place of judgment as well as a place of entertainment. It could seat about 25,000 people, so we should imagine quite a large crowd bring involved in the riot.



Acts 19:30, "Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him." Paul apparently saw the situation as an opportunity to speak about Jesus to a large crowd, but the disciples were afraid for Paul's life and they would not let him reveal himself before the rioting crowd. In the theater, confusion reigned and people were shouting different things and many did not even know what was going on at all. We are not sure exactly why, but the Jews pushed a man named Alexander out front and he tried to speak to the crowd. **Acts 19:34** tells us, **"But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'"**

The huge crowd of people went into a frenzy as they shouted for their religious and civic pride. With the shape of the theater, the sound probably echoed for miles. But, although Artemis was considered great in that time, today you cannot find anybody who worships Artemis. Artemis was worshipped in Ephesus for more than 1,500 years. But in 268 AD the temple was destroyed and the idol was forgotten. An idol may last a thousand years or more, but eventually every idol will be overthrown and forgotten.

But the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth created even time itself. He is transcendent over time and space. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Concerning our Lord Jesus, **Colossians 1:16** tells us, **"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."** Artemis of the Ephesians is gone, but Jesus remains forever and is worshipped today by many millions of people in every land.

Paul's preaching in Ephesus was so effective that it was changing the economy and the political situation in the city. People were turning to Jesus and repenting from idols and their sins. Non-Christian societies are often tolerant of Christian evangelists as long as the number of people believing in the gospel is small. But if a lot of people start becoming Christians, there is sometimes a violent backlash.

One night a couple of years ago, I went to share a message at Nishinari Shiminkan, just south of Shin-Imamiya Station. It is an area with a lot of homeless people and also some illicit businesses run by the yakuza. I was early, so I was walking around the area a bit. Suddenly three tough-looking guys with tattoos surrounded me and asked, "What are you doing here?" I think they thought I was a competitor who was trying to steal their business. Sadly, when I told them I was there to tell people about the love of Jesus they let me go. The yakuza did not see the preaching of the gospel as a threat to their profits.



Let's pray that our gospel message will someday become so effective that not only the business of the yakuza, but also every business that exalts idols or sin will close. When the church in Osaka becomes truly effective at sharing the Good News of Jesus, the people who are engaged in work that is offensive to God will fight against the church. But in the end, the love of God will conquer all.

IV. Conclusion

Let's close with one more verse from Isaiah. **Isaiah 44:6, "This is what the LORD says-- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."**

V. Prayer