

The Gospel and our Idols, Part 1 - Acts 19:1-20

Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

On to Ephesus. Acts 19 picks up the story of Paul's third missionary journey, continuing his effort to preach the Gospel and plant churches in every major city all over the Greco-Roman world. He briefly visited Ephesus on his return trip to Antioch at the end of his second journey. While there the first believers begged him to stay, but Paul believed it was the will of the Lord for him to return to Jerusalem and Antioch, but promised that if it was God's will he would return. And return he did, staying for about three years in this city, making it the longest tenure with a local church in all of his journeys.

Ephesus was a key Roman city in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey), sitting on the southwest corner and serving as a major sea port for both travel and commerce. It was a fairly wealthy city and the most populated city in Asia, the fifth largest city in the Roman Empire. Ephesus had a long and illustrious history, dating back to over 1000 years before Jesus, and this history included long being known for its idolatry. It was long known as the cult center for worship of the pagan mother goddess, so when the region was conquered by the Greeks they renamed the worship for the Greek goddess Artemis. By the time of the New Testament, the Roman world knew Ephesus because of its ancient shrine and as the temple keeper for Artemis. The most significant structure in the city was the ancient temple to Artemis, considered one of the seven architectural wonders of the ancient world. It was a magnificent structure, larger than the Parthenon in Greece, and filled with amazing images and structures. A beautiful statue of the goddess was at the center, and people would travel to Ephesus just to see the statue (which strangely had seven breasts) and worship the goddess. The city also had a theater with a capacity of 24,000, a stadium for games, and a significant agora (marketplace). Needless to say, this goddess gave the city its sense of identity and purpose. Furthermore, the worship of this goddess was accompanied with all sorts of occultic practices and what we would call black magic arts. The city boasted one of the largest libraries in the ancient world, and a third of the books contained were dedicated to the spells and incantations dedicated to this goddess. Yet, the worship of all the other Greco-Roman gods were evident as well. In Athens Paul found the city full of all kinds of idols. Here, he finds many of them, but much of the wealth and notoriety for Ephesus lied in its allegiance to Artemis.

So it is not strange to find the city filled with all kinds of spiritualities which show up in the story as Paul invests a long period of ministry, preaching the Kingdom of God in this city. Our story this week shows us the various spiritualities that existed in the city. Paul proclaims Jesus to a band of John the Baptist's disciples, Jews in a synagogue, and to a crowd after a crazy demonic episode. That story is one of the most bizarre in all of Scripture, as seven self identified itinerant Jewish exorcists are beaten up by a single demon possessed man. But the focus of the chapter is the amazing evangelistic success in Ephesus, nothing short of an awakening and revival in Ephesus. The text tells us that the Word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily, so much so that not just Ephesus, but, "All the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Paul begins his ministry in the synagogue, as he always does, but after they harden their hearts and reject the Gospel he begins renting a school building called the Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus and daily preaches and teaches the church. Get this, the church in Ephesus was planted and met in a school. His ministry here was accompanied by incredible power and miracles, so much so that people were getting healed and demons were being expelled when Paul's work clothes were given to them. Yet the key thing here is that the Gospel shows up in the city of Artemis and claims spiritual authority. Jesus will not join a salad bar

of spirituality, becoming one of many gods. He is not here to join Artemis in the pantheon, Jesus came as King as the True Kingdom of God, which demands the death of their idols. This is the key truth in this chapter. Our hearts are idol factories, and the Gospel will either kill our idols or our hearts will be hardened over time to Jesus and His glory. Tim Keller defines our idols this way, “An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’ There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.” – Counterfeit Gods by Timothy Keller

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Leviticus 24	Leviticus 25	Leviticus 26	Leviticus 27	Ephesians 1	Ephesians 2	Ephesians 3

Reading from this past week: Acts 19:1-20

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 19:21-41

Family Worship

Song - *Come thou Fount of Every Blessing*

<https://youtu.be/yINnG5bxnsE>

Gospel Project

Unit: Warnings to the People

Story: Zephaniah warned God’s people to repent

Big Picture Question: What is repentance?

Answer: Repentance is turning from sin and turning to Jesus?

Scripture: Zephaniah

New City Catechism

Question #43: What are the sacraments and ordinances?

Answer: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

Verse: Romans 6:4, Luke 22:19-20

Scripture

Acts 19:1-20

- Do you find anything in this story bizarre? If so, what, and what do you believe is happening in the story when it happens?
- What are the different spiritualities and religious world views Paul encounters? How does the Gospel speak to each of them?
- What does the response of those who believe in Jesus in verses 17-20 tell us about the call of the Gospel as it relates to our idols?

Prayer

*Pray for our Bonfire this week.

*Pray that God would expose our idols and lead us to repentance.