



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 19: 21-41

Acts

“No Small Disturbance”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Acts 19 and we have a rather lengthy portion, verses 21-41. We have come in our study to Paul's mission in Ephesus, a major city on the western coast of modern Turkey, what was then Asia Minor, and he's had an amazing ministry there. But it's coming to an end now and one reason it will end is because of the disturbance that occurs there, and Luke gives a great deal of attention to this riot in Ephesus and probably gives a lot of attention to it because this is the means by which God and his providence moved the apostle Paul on in his ministry, which would take him from there to Jerusalem, and then, eventually to Rome. He gives a detailed discussion of it and it's a passage, I think, filled with some interesting and helpful lessons to us, but we begin in verse 21.

"Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. 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, 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 shall fall in 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!' 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!' 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 the 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." May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the privilege we have to be gathered here together here this morning and to open the scriptures, to read them, to consider their meaning in some depth. This is a great privilege because it's your inerrant word and it is through the reading and the study of Your word that we grow in the knowledge of you, and we grow in grace, and we mature in the Christian life. That is what we look to do this morning, Father. We pray for that. We pray that You would guide us, that You would direct us, that You would bless our thinking, that we would understand what

Luke has written, that we would understand the significance of this great event in Ephesus, and we would understand its application to us. That will vary, Father, from person to person. We all have different needs and you know our hearts and our condition better than we. You know the course of our life. You know where it's headed. We're reminded of that in our text, that You work all things providentially. And so, we look to You to bless us, Father. Bless us with the concerns of the day, that you would meet them, and that you would encourage us, and build us up in the faith, and prepare us for what's coming tomorrow, what's coming next month. This is how we prepare for the future, through our study of Your word, so may it be fruitful.

We, Father, are a needy people spiritually, but we are also in great need physically as well, and we pray for those who have asked for our prayers. We pray for those who are sick or those who are recovering from illness. We, and we pray for our nation. We pray that You bless us as we approach days of great decision. We pray that You would bless us, bless this land, bless the people who will vote, that they will vote wisely and well. You have blessed this country in so many ways and one way is we have the opportunity to choose our representatives and our government officials. It is a great privilege to be able to do that. May we take advantage of that. May we use our privileges well and wisely, and we pray that You would bless because ultimately, Father, we know that it's You that raise up leaders, and so, we pray for good ones.

We pray for our land. Pray for it politically. We pray for it materially. We pray for various blessings like that, but most of all, Father, we pray that You would bless it spiritually and that You would use us in that great task. That's what You have put us here for, it is to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. May we do that. May we be encouraged to do that, instructed to do that this morning in the things we study. So bless us to that end and bless us this evening as we gather again in this place to celebrate the Lord Supper and remember His death for us, and remember that He's coming again. What a great hope that is, Father, that He will come again, He will establish His kingdom on this earth, and He will come with His reward. May we live for that. Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] The devil is described as a prince and he has a domain. The whole world lies in the evil one, John says, and he is protective of his realm. Just as the ancient Romans used force to subdue the occasional slave revolt and wars of liberation,

Satan also uses force whenever people are delivered from his power and his realm is threatened. So if we are doing God's work, we can expect opposition. There are no exceptions to that and lots of testimonies to it.

Francois Coillard was a missionary sent out to South Africa by the Paris evangelical mission in the late 19th century. His mission was a very hard one. He met opposition all along the way and many of his colleagues died. He didn't see much fruit. In fact, it wasn't until after his death that developments occurred that showed that he had not died in vain. Well, out of his experience, he once wrote, "The evangelization of the world is a desperate struggle with the prince of darkness, and with everything his rage can stir up in the shape of obstacles, vexations, oppositions, and hatred, whether by circumstances or by the hand of man, it is a serious task. Oh, it should mean a life of consecration." When we are doing God's work and when God is doing a work in us we can expect opposition from the evil one. And so, the Christian life does call for dedication. It does call for consecration and for courage, for the willingness to stand firm against opposition. No one knew that better than the apostle Paul. He knew opposition. He knew the rage of the devil and was ready to put his life on the line. In fact, he did that many times. He did that in Ephesus, when there occurred what Luke called no small disturbance concerning the Way.

Now, that's an understatement. It was no small occurrence is true. It's a very large riot that took place and Paul's life was threatened by it, but he was ready to face down the mob. He knew what John would later write, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." We are secure in Him. Our lives are not left to chance or uncertainty, and in Acts 19, we see what happens when a person is consecrated to Christ. There is conflict, but also fruit, also good results and complete security. Paul had seen amazing results in Ephesus. It was a city notorious for its occult practices, but Paul went to that place, that very dark city and he preached the word, he brought light into it and miracles accompanied his ministry, and both Christians and non-Christians were profoundly affected by the ministry that he had there.

The church, first of all, consecrated itself. Christians confessed their sins. They began putting away practices that had been carried over from their pagan past. They wanted to change. Now, that's sanctification. It is the result of the new life, the life of Christ, which is controlling and constraining within the child of God and it did that

with them. It constrained them. It controlled them. God, in that new life that He gives us, gives with it a Godly disposition. He gives with that new life new desires, new appetites. It's what Thomas Chalmers meant when he spoke of the expulsive power of a new affection. That's what we have in Jesus Christ.

Now, the study of scripture is important in that. The teaching of the word of God gives growth to the inner man. It feeds the new life that is the child of God's, and that life as it grows is very active, and it expels the deadness that remains from the old life. There is an expulsive power to it. There is a new affection that we have. And these believers in Ephesus had that. The church changed through the ministry of the apostle Paul. And the pagans of Ephesus were affected as well, from Paul's ministry, but no doubt from the ministry of the Christians also who had consecrated themselves to the Lord's work and many of the magicians of that city, the sorcerers, believed. They burned their books of magic and Luke writes that the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. All who lived in Asia heard the Gospel.

Paul spent three years in Ephesus ministering night and day, but there came a point when Paul knew that it was time for him to move on. The ministry had come to its natural conclusion through his persistent labors was firmly established there and he now felt that he could safely leave. And so, in verse 21, he speaks of returning to Jerusalem by way of the Macedonian churches, and then, he adds, "I must also see Rome." From there, we know that it was his desire to go on to Spain, which was the western end of Roman civilization, but Luke's interest was in Rome. That is the goal of this book, and from this point on, the book of Acts moves toward that goal. It moves toward the capital of the empire and it ends with Paul there in Rome preaching the Kingdom of God. But before doing that, before going to Rome, Paul intended to visit the churches of Macedonia and Greece in order to take up a collection, which he and others would then deliver to Jerusalem for the poor people of that city.

Well, that was his plan and the Lord was in it. Luke writes, "Paul purposed in the Spirit to go." Now, that could mean in his own spirit, in his human spirit, but probably what Luke means here is in the Holy Spirit, which would also include his human spirit, but this was God's plan. Paul's plan was God's plan. That seems to be Luke's meaning in making that statement, and circumstances quickly developed in Ephesus that began Paul on that journey probably sooner than he himself had planned

to move. Luke writes in verse 23 that "About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way."

Well, it certainly wasn't a small disturbance. It was a riot that Luke devotes a great deal of attention to and it was a dangerous incident. But as dangerous as it was, as violent as it could have been, the hand of God was in all of this. Now, that wasn't evident at the time, but then that's the nature of providence. It's not until later that events make sense to us. We find ourselves in a difficult circumstance. We puzzle over why this has happened, why we've been frustrated, why we have had this or that difficulty, and all of our plans seem to have come to nothing. We don't understand. It's often times later that there's an understanding of why things took place the way they did. We have a number of examples of that in the Bible.

Joseph comes to mind, sold into slavery by his brothers, sold down to Egypt, and for some time, for years he must've wondered why this had occurred, but it had a purpose. God's hand was in it all. He came to understand that at the end of his life because through that event, through that evil done by his brothers, he came into a position where he could be the deliverer of his family and of the nation.

Ruth comes to mind as well, a woman who became a widow, but it was through that, it was the result of that that she moved from Moab to Judah and she became part of the messianic line. She had no idea that that was the way events were moving when she and Orpah were saying goodbye to Naomi there in Moab. Their husbands had died. They were in grief and they were separating from one another, but it was through that event that she and her mother-in-law moved to Judah and the great events of her life took place through that tragedy.

The book of Esther is all about the providence of God. The word God's not even mentioned in that book, and yet, it's all about Him. It's all about His providence and how events fell into place to put Esther in the position to save her people from extermination.

We give many examples of this. God governs everything, and while that may not be clear during a time of turmoil, very often it comes into clear focus later. So that should remind us that in the midst of turmoil, in the midst of hardship and disappointments, we are to remain firm in our faith in our trust in the Lord. We don't understand how things are moving. We don't understand why things have come into

place, specifically at least, but we can rely on the fact that God does, God's in control, and trust Him in the midst of it.

William Cooper, the old hymn writer and great English poet has a very sound line in one of his hymns. "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace. Behind a frowning providence He hides a small face." God moves in a mysterious way. Now, that is the assurance that we have as Christians. Nothing happens by chance, even Satan's attacks upon us are God's purpose for our lives.

The Scottish divine, Samuel Rutherford, said "Satan is only God's master fencer to teach us to use our weapons." In other words, his attack, Satan's attacks against us sharpen us. They cause us to develop in our skills as Christians and learn to use more effectively the things, the tools that God has given us, and the opportunities to draw close to the throne of grace and develop as Christian men and women. We need to be put to the test, otherwise we won't develop as Christians.

I was reading the other day about the barbarians, the Goths, in Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and how they swept away many of the cities of northern Asian Minor. Gibbon made this observation. "Three hundred years of peace enjoyed by the soft inhabitants of Asia had abolished the exercise of arms and removed the apprehension of danger." They lived in peace for so long, they had no struggles for so long that they allowed things to just deteriorate. They allowed the ancient walls of their cities to crumble, and when danger came, they were absolutely unprepared for it and they were swept away.

Now, that can happen spiritually. Without spiritual challenges, we will grow soft. We will grow weak. We will grow unaccustomed to the weapons of warfare that God has given us, the use of His word, and prayer, and the character of each one of us will grow soft and unprepared for hardship when it comes. But when we walk by the Spirit and we live obedient lives, we live Christ-like lives, opposition will come. We can expect that, but God will use that for our good to train us, and temper us, and make us more effective. "Satan is only God's master fencer to teach us to use our weapons."

Now, we learn a lot about Satan's opposition from our text and of God's providence and protection when a disturbance broke out, which had the potential of being ugly. It occurred in Ephesus because the Gospel had progressed there and because it had become a threat to the pagan worship of that city, particularly a threat to

shut down the Temple of Artemis and all of the business that was connected with it. Ephesus was a center of trade. It was a port city on the Mediterranean, but because of a continual problem of the harbor filling up with sediment and limiting its capacity for ships, Ephesus in Paul's day was in decline as a commercial power.

As a result, the city's economy began to depend less and less on foreign trade and more and more it was closely tied to the cult of Artemis, whose temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was believed that her image had been fashioned in heaven and fallen from the sky. There is probably some basis in fact or history in that, in that what probably happened was a meteorite fell and it resembled a woman and became an object of worship. What developed was a vile religion. It was a fertility cult, which was rather common in the ancient world, a nature religion. The idol of the goddess was in the grotesque form of a multi-breasted woman. Temple prostitution was practiced and it had a large following.

Thousands of pilgrims would come to Ephesus from all over the empire, and naturally, business grew up around the temple to serve the needs of these pilgrims. So whatever affected the worship of Artemis also affected the businesses that were connected with the cult. One of the most prominent businesses was the silversmith trade. The silversmiths made miniature shrines and images of the goddess, which devotees would buy, and then, they would dedicate to the temple, and the temple would then take the silver objects, melt them down, and turn them into coins. So this trade, this business that occurred because of the pilgrims and the tourists to the city enriched both the silversmiths and the temple. It was big business.

The sale of these shrines was a source of large profit for these people, but during Paul's ministry that was affected negatively. Income was down and over this three-year period, the silversmiths began to notice a decline in profits. There weren't as many people in the temple. There weren't as many customers in their shops, but the church in Ephesus was growing, and they realized what had happened. The demand for religious souvenirs had shrunk because Christianity had spread. Paul had been preaching the word of God and Christians had become serious about their faith, and they began giving the Gospel to those they met.

Since Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia, all roads in Asia converged in that city. And so, people came to Ephesus to do business or they came to

experience the features of the city, the baths, the games, the theater, or they came to worship the goddess, and as they did so, as they moved from one place to another in the city, they met Christians and they heard the Gospel. While they were there, they may have gone to hear Paul teaching. They learned about his ministry and became curious. They knew that he was teaching about Christianity. He was answering questions about it. And so, some dropped in to hear him, and as they did, they listened to his ministry and they were converted. And so, in these ways and other ways, people traveled out from the city to various places. The Gospel spread to the outlying towns of Colossae, and Laodicea, Smyrna, and Pergamum, and Thyatira, Philadelphia; the seven churches of Asia Minor. And as they did, pagan society was affected.

That wasn't the case in Ephesus only. This was a pattern that developed in the ancient world and a similar situation that occurred 70 years later in Bithynia in Asia Minor, we see the same kind of thing. The governor of the region was named Pliny, and he wrote letters to the Emperor Trajan seeking advice on what to do with these Christians in the region. He had interviewed some of them. They weren't bad people, but they were having a bad effect upon the economy. The sale of fodder, the sale of hay and oats for the sacrificial animals was down. The business of the butchers who sold the meat of animal sacrifice to idols, that was down. People weren't going to the temples. And so, he sought some advice from the Emperor, and Trajan counseled restraint, but the economy was being affected by the spread of the Gospel.

When the church is earnest, when it is serious about its faith and it is living its faith, then it will have an effect on society. It will have an effect on the economy of the world. We live in troubling times. We all are aware of that. We see it all around us. We know from all that we know about the world that we are living in a materialistic, pleasure-seeking world that is becoming it seems increasingly hedonistic. And that troubles us, but it is not a worse world than the one the apostles lived in. It is not a more pagan society than the one they lived in. And just as the apostles and the early church affected for the good their world, we can do the same. We should be doing the same, but we should be doing it in the way that they did it, not by public protests and organized boycotts. Those measures, at least it seems to me, are not all that helpful. They accomplish very little. But to do this over the long-term, to cause a real effect in society, and that happens by a different kind of life. It happens by a life of holiness. It

happens through obedience. It happens by living a pure life and speaking the truth, speaking the truth in love, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15. Now, that happens over time.

A Christian life is a serious task. It should mean a life of consecration, a life of consecration. That's how we live out our lives and over time changes occur. When we consecrate ourselves in all areas, this will happen. When we do that, we will start using our money, we will start using our time in ways that will affect the economy and society because as we give the Gospel, lives will be changed and people will behave differently. That's what Paul did. That's what the early church did and it had an effect. People just stopped going to the temples, didn't want to go there anymore. They had a new understanding of things. They didn't have an interest in pagan products or pagan practices. Well, that happened with the preaching of the Gospel because people were changed. They became new creatures in Christ and their orientation toward life was different. Their desires were different. That's how change, real change, occurs.

Well, it occurred in Ephesus, so much so that the silversmiths were alarmed. I suppose at the beginning they hadn't paid much attention to this new group that had come along and this new preaching, if they even knew about it, but when it began to affect their wallets, then they took careful notice of it, and to stop the decline in profits, one of them, Demetrius, called a meeting of the guild of silversmiths and he gave a speech. Men, he said, do "You know that our prosperity depends upon this business? Do you see and hear that not only 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 Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence." It was a clever speech.

Demetrius appealed to their love of money, but he wasn't so crass as to do it that way. He disguised his appeal in, first of all, an appeal to patriotism, and then, to piety. So he kept all of this respectable, assuring them that their cause was a noble cause. It was all about religion and civic pride. The bottom line was pure greed and that's not unusual. Money is often the motive in religion and the love of money blinds people to spiritual truth. It certainly had in Ephesus, but we see that all through the Bible, all

through the history of mankind that's been the case. We read about the wages of _____. We see that same problem in the Gospels. Our Lord enters the temple on two different occasions and has to cleanse it. He throws out the money changers and the merchants.

Human nature really doesn't change much at all apart from grace. That's what changes it and money was a motive for the guild's concern for Artemis. It's not that they were such devoted, pious men and loved this goddess and all the good things she stood for, she didn't stand for good things, but they made money from this worship. She was a kind of cash cow and Demetrius suddenly appealed to that, and his speech was effective. It provoked a riot.

The silversmiths were filled with rage and they began crying out, saying "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" They took to the streets and their excitement spread, so that we read "The City was filled with confusion." As a crowd gathered, they marched through the streets and the crowd got bigger and bigger, and it made its way to the theater, which still stands today. It's a large theater. Its day, it could accommodate something like 25,000 people. I don't know if that many people filled it, but it had a number of people there, and they staged a rally for Artemis. Paul heard of it. The whole city heard of it, but Paul took particular notice of it because they had grabbed, this mob had grabbed two of his friends, Gaius and Aristarchus, and Paul wanted to go into the assembly to help them and also to stop the riot. He was ready to put his life on the line and he would have, but friends stopped him. Some of them were very influential men in the city. It was a volatile situation. His presence might only enflame things. And so, after repeatedly urging him not to enter the theater, Paul took their counsel, which was wise.

Inside it was chaos. Luke describes the scene in verse 32. "So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was on confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together." Most didn't even know why they were there. Luke must have seen the humor in that, perhaps that's why he describes it as he did. They knew somebody had done something. They didn't know who it was or what, but they were very excited about it and ready to fight.

Now, there may have been something here of a deeper lesson about the character of the world because this is a picture of the world. This is a pagan city and a

pagan, a theater filled with pagan men, and what do we read about the city? It was filled with confusion. And what do we read about the people in the theater? They're filled with confusion. They don't know why they're there, but they're very excited about whatever it is that has brought them there, and that's so often the way it is with the world. They become very determined, very excited, very zealous for whatever they believe, but what they believe is confusion. There's no order to their lives. There's no order to their thinking. And this is very much the way it was in Ephesus.

Well, a Jewish man named Alexander, not a believer, tried to do what Paul did not do. He stepped into the crowd to calm it. He was a representative of the Jewish community, which was large in Ephesus and well-positioned, but that community knew that anti-Semitism was always just under the surface in Greek and Roman society, and so, to disassociate the synagogue from the church and prevent the mob's anger against Paul from boiling over onto them, they sent this man Alexander to speak to the assembly. But when he stepped to the podium and motioned with his hands for their attention, Luke writes, "They recognized that he was Jew," which they considered no better than a Christian. They both are basically the same in their eyes. They worship an invisible God. They oppose the gods and the idols that they worship. And so, they saw him and they shouted him down with a chant. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And they went on doing that for two hours, but that was all they did.

As one writer put it, in the final analysis, the only thing heathenism can do against Paul is to shout itself hoarse. The devil can only touch God's servants by God's permission, and then, only for the good of God's servants. Well, finally, the town clerk, who was the chief official of the city got wind of what was going on, and he made his way down to the theater where he made a rather reasonable speech to this crowd, at least he appealed to their reason, and in so doing, he did restore order. He reassured them that they didn't need to worry about the honor of the goddess and the prestige of the city. Everyone in the world knew that her image had fallen from heaven and that the Ephesians guarded it and they guarded her temple. And so, he pointed out that this riot was completely unnecessary. They should all remain calm and commit no crime. "For," he said, "you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess."

In other words, Paul and his companions were innocent. They hadn't attacked the temple. They hadn't slandered the goddess. They had not been sacrilegious. But he added, if anyone had complaints against them, he should take those complaints to the law courts. That's the proper procedure. The courts are in session, he said, and the proconsuls are available. Then he dismissed the assembly and everyone left. The uproar came to nothing.

God protected the apostle and the church by means of a pagan man who calmed the crowd. God can use anything. God works in mysterious ways and He can use the most unlikely people to serve His purpose, further His cause, and protect His apostles and His saints. Well, this defense by the clerk is interesting and significant because of what it does say about Paul's style of ministry. He said these men are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. What that indicates is that Paul's ministry was not negative, meaning he didn't make it his mission to attack the pagan religions.

Now, certainly he warned young believers and old believers alike of the vices of paganism and he exposed the errors of it. Demetrius indicates that in verse 26. Paul taught that gods made with hands are no gods at all. That's what the prophets taught. Isaiah and Jeremiah are filled with that kind of teaching. He did expose error and no doubt he addressed the cults that were there in the city, but that was not Paul's primary approach. Paul knew that the Gospel would bring down the cult of Artemis as lives were changed and temples were emptied. What Paul did was teach the truth.

In fact, when we come to chapter 20 in a few weeks, we will see a description that he gives of his ministry. It was a very positive ministry. He preached the whole counsel of God. He preached the truth of God's word, and we're not told what all that was. We can look at the book of Ephesians and get a sense of what he taught, but he taught the people about the nature of God. He taught them that the one God is a triune God. He taught them about the person and work of Jesus Christ and how the Christian is to walk in this world, how we are to live among the pagans. He taught them about grace. He taught them about all the doctrines of the word of God and that is a very positive ministry. The Gospel itself is a positive message. It gives the hope of life for the spiritually dead. It is the promise of forgiveness for sinners, the message of God's love, His grace to the helpless and the undeserving. That's good news. There's no more positive message than that and that's what Paul preached, and his life was an

example of grace to others.

So, in fact, no fault was found in him. He was not found to be a fire brand, a revolutionary type. He didn't rob temples or blaspheme the goddess. He didn't march up to the temple and protest the immoral conduct and the foolishness of all of that. He preached the word of God. He preached Christ and Him crucified. He preached the resurrection and he invited sinners to believe and become children of God. And what was the outcome? The temples were robbed of worshippers and the gods and goddesses were forgotten.

When Paul began preaching, the empire was thoroughly pagan. Within 300 years, Christianity had advanced and idolatry had practically vanished from the civilized world. The world didn't become Christian by any means, but the idols were defeated. Demetrius had said that all of Asia and the world worshipped the goddess. And the clerk said, who in the world doesn't know about this great temple and this goddess? Well, who in the world knows about Artemis today? Well, you do, but outside of this auditorium, who knows about the goddess Artemis and who worships her today? No one in the world worships Artemis. What's left of that temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, is just a foundation that was uncovered 20 years ago. A religion that was forgotten, and yet, go through the world and billions of people know the name Jesus Christ and millions of people worship him every day. That's the triumph of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it will continue to triumph.

Let me conclude by bringing some of the lessons of this passage together. First, when we are doing the Lord's work and when the Lord is doing a work in us, changing us, using us, when we are walking with Him, there will be opposition. Secondly, we should not fear that. That is a good sign. It is an evidence that we are growing, that we are living an apostolic life, and it is proof that we are having an effect, that we are having a good influence. That's what stirs up Satan's opposition. The prince of darkness comes against us when we are a threat to his domain. And so, we can expect that if we're doing the work of God, if God's working within us and using us, that is a sign of it. So we shouldn't fear it. Thirdly, we should not fear opposition because God's in control of it all. He uses opposition of our good. That's the greatness of God, that Satan can throw his fiery darts, he can come at us like a roaring lion, and all of it only serves to further the purpose of God and sanctify us and build us up in the faith.

Now, you may not understand that at the time and see how it's working together for good, but when the word of God assures us of it that is the case. And so, we can rest in that. We don't need to fear opposition because God controls it all and through those kinds of experiences God providentially leads us through this riot, which threatened the life of the apostle Paul. God sent Paul on his way, which ultimately led him to Rome and to his ministry there. Fourthly, we are to stand firm. We are to be witnesses, and do that with confidence, and do it with grace. Since God is in control, all things work together for our good, and so, we can do that. We can be confident. We can rejoice in the midst of all circumstances. There will be disappointments. Rejection is not easy. Abuse is not easy. But we have the truth, and while we will be rejected and we will meet with difficulty, we have the words of life.

God is able to cause people to hear, to listen, to obey, and He will do that. He will do it. And in that way change in society will occur. History bears that out. It's happened many times, but changing society is not our mission. Living as changed people in society is. Bringing glory to God through our life is our goal. We may not bring about the changes that we desire, but we can live as changed men and women in this world, as channels of God's grace so that the world cannot point a finger at us and accuse us of any wrongdoing. They may not accept us, they may not like us for what we are, but they cannot object to us as to the way we live. That's what we're to be doing; bringing glory to God in our lives. It's when Christ returns that change will occur. He's going to change everything.

Until then, we are to be faithful servants. So may God help us to do that in this day and in this place, but it may be that some of you here are not servants of God because you are not children of God. You've not believed in Jesus Christ. If that is so, then I urge you to do that. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in Him as savior. He is God's eternal son, who became a man, lived a perfect life, so that He could offer that life as a perfect sacrifice for sinners, and that is what you are. That is what we all are; sinners in need of a savior and He's the savior. And how do we have that salvation? We receive it as a gift, through faith and faith alone. May God help you to understand that, that you're a sinner in need of a savior. You cannot obtain your salvation by your own works. Nothing that you can do will please God. You can only receive what He has done, what His son has done and has pleased Him. Receive it by

faith, and in so doing, receive the forgiveness of sins at the moment you believe and life that's everlasting. God help you to do that and help all of us to live a life of service to our Lord. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this incident in the apostle's life, this riot that had all of the potential of bringing injury to him and many others, and yet, we see how You protected through all of it. No harm came to anyone and You even used it in the life and the ministry of the apostle to move him on in the work that You had for him. And it reminds us that, Father, that is the way it is in life, that difficulties come. We don't understand them at the time. We seek to put an end to them and sometimes we can and sometimes we can't, but all of it is under your providential guidance and care, and You use it all in our lives. And so, we praise You for that, that You are the sovereign God who controls everything, and that can give us confidence. It should give us confidence to rest in you and to be active for Your cause, which is our cause, the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we be effective in that. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.