

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 19:21 as we continue in our studies verse by verse through the book of Acts.

It is a narrative. We've told you that, I know, several times. Narratives tend to report activity as opposed to define or teach doctrine by words. And so the lessons from narratives are usually learned in just - what does God want us to know, what does He tell us about this? And looking at it, we then get a history of the birth and the growth of the early church for about thirty years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It is, to me, the Bible blueprint for what the church should be. We can learn here what God was concerned about, what the church in ministry was concerned about, what type of people the Lord used, and how they went about doing what they were doing - in accountability, in investment, in strategy. This is the narrative of the early church. So, church, look at this.

The first fifteen years of the church focus on the establishment of the church amongst the Jews, mostly in Jerusalem. It was a fulfillment of all that they had in their Old Testament - the coming of the Messiah. When Saul was converted, when James was killed, when Peter was sent by the Lord to Cornelius' house, when folks who left Jerusalem under the persecution ended up 300 miles to the north in Syria, and they began to share, it became very clear what God always intended - to save Gentiles as well as Jews. His desire is that all men would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). And the big battle, certainly, in the early church was - how do you get saved? Is it certainly by grace? Do you become a Jew and then you become a Christian? Are there steps to take? And that's all resolved, really, by the first fifteen chapters of the book and the meeting that ended up in Jerusalem.

The last half of the book and certainly the last fifteen years of the book, and virtually all of the epistles that will follow in your Bible, have to do with the gospel going out into all the world. And it is primarily focused, at least in the narrative, on the life of Paul and his gang of helpers over 46 to about 57-58 A.D., thirteen years or so; three long missionary journeys - one to the Galatian area. We have these maps. If you don't have one (I can't imagine after all these weeks, you don't have one), they're at the counter, and the ushers can get them for you. But it was mostly Galatia; today it is Turkey. The second trip that Paul took - very extensive,

six-year trip - was mostly to Europe. And Paul took Barnabas on his first trip; took a guy named Silas on his second. Timothy joined them. Luke joined them on the second trip as well as some others. The third trip (and with every trip) Paul goes back to visit the churches already established. Paul's main focus was upon Ephesus. If the end of the second trip was a year and a half in Corinth, Paul spent three years in Ephesus. And just as a side note, and maybe you haven't noticed, but when you get to verse 5 of chapter 18 (we're a little past that now), Silas is mentioned for the last time, and he disappears from the scene. We don't know what happened to him. We don't know if he quit, gave up, died. We're just not told. He's just not a part of what was going on anymore. So, not sure how to explain that to you; I don't have an answer. I can tell you what people think, but really what good would that do you?

So, we are currently with Paul on his third and final trip to these church plantings as the Word of God goes out, mostly amongst the Gentiles; at least that's the coverage of the narrative. And it is his final trip in the mission field before he returns to Jerusalem, and those prison years of Paul really begin forward from that point. As Paul began his third trip (back in verse 23 of chapter 18), he went back to the familiar places. He went back to Galatia, went back to the county of Phrygia along the coast there, and then he ended up in Ephesus where he had left his friends, Aquila and Priscilla, ministering. They had ministered to a guy named Apollos. He had shown up there from Egypt. He had come to know the Lord, and he didn't really know much more than the baptism of John; but eventually they kind of led him into the fullness of the gospel. He was excited about what God was doing. He ended up going to Corinth, where he joined in the work that Paul had begun. He had left behind several folks who he had ministered to that also had very little information beyond, "John said we should repent and be ready for the Messiah." Paul meets twelve of them, early on in this chapter, leads them in a relationship with Christ, prays that they be baptized in the Holy Spirit. We spent a whole week on the necessity of the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon our lives. And then we continued in this book because chapter 19 is really the report; much of the three years of Paul's life here is borne out with this ministry. Paul saw growth in record numbers, if you will.

Last week, beginning in verse 8 down through verse 20, we ended with the words, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." What a great description of what God was doing. Paul spent three months in the synagogue, as he always went there first. The synagogue was, for the most part, Jews who had an Old

Testament history, had a place from which to step forward. Paul ministered for three months. He was very faithful. He argued from the Scriptures. He presented the gospel in a way that was clear. After three months, those who were going to be saved, I guess, did, and the others were angry and wanted him to leave. This time he left, and he went, if you will, to a school - a fellow named Tyrannus. He rented a schoolhouse, a school classroom. We told you that the practices in Paul's day were that you worked in the morning and in the evening, but in the middle of the day, it was almost like that siesta period. And so when they were shut down - everyone was at lunch or taking a nap - Paul used the room to meet with folks who wanted to hear the gospel. And for over two years, he taught them day in and day out, and the result was phenomenal. In fact, we read in verse 10 of this chapter, "And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Didn't matter. Cross-cultural and amazing. From verse 11 through verse 12 last week, we looked at something very peculiar. Not only was God's Word going forth in power, but the power of the Lord was upon Paul; so much so that the handkerchief or the sweatband that he put around his head or the apron with which he built the tents were carried from him to sick folks. Just contact with them made them well. Very unique. The Bible calls it "unusual." We talked about points of contact releasing our faith; how faith has to be active and not just passive. And it left such an impact that this city that was filled with the occult (verse 19) found them gathering together and burning their old books and chants and all their witchcraft and turning from magic and the occult to Christ. And so we ended with the words, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

Tonight we hope to be able to go from verse 21 through the end of the chapter; it's kind of one story together - it's hard to break up. But we'll start in verse 21 with these words, "When these things were accomplished," (two years and three months, at least) "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." We know from verse 31 of chapter 20, when Paul meets with these elders of this church on his way back, that he said to them, "You know how I've been with you for the last three years." There're two years and three months accounted for here. So, we've got a little time, if you will. But after those two years and three months - and Paul would stay quite a bit longer yet - he felt led in his spirit to move along. He sent two of his guys ahead, but he really felt like the Lord was moving. It's kind of like

when he was in the midst of the revival at Corinth, if you were with us. We talked about how hard it is to hear God direct you when everything's going your way. If every door is shut, you go, "Well, the Lord told me to leave." Of course He did, cuz nothing's going your way. But if everything's going your way, and you go, "Well, I figure the Lord wants me to leave," that's a much harder step of faith. Philip did it in Samaria, you remember, years earlier; in the midst of a revival, he was told to go out to the wilderness. So, it is hard to hear God when, like I said, things are going well. But here's a man that was clearly in touch with the Holy Spirit. Luke does not give us any details in the book of Acts here, but we know from the letters that Paul wrote from here to the Corinthians and to the Romans, what his initial plans were. In fact, he wrote to both the Corinthians and the Romans that he intended to go through Greece to visit the churches; and you can look at your map references. He went to Neapolis and Philippi and then went down the Aegean coast all the way to Athens. And that he wanted to visit the churches he had planted; he wanted to gather an offering that he wanted to take to the poor in Jerusalem. He'd done this before, but he felt it was more important now than ever. So he was hitting up all these Gentile churches and saying, "Could you give to the poor in Jerusalem?" Though Paul was never (I wouldn't say loved) very supported in Jerusalem, his love for the body there never wavered. And so this was a mercy mission in one sense. And there's a tangible, I think, lesson in the fact that whenever you go to the mission field, there is always this feeling of unity and oneness, even though you may not speak the same language. I've noticed that the years that I've gone and visited our missionaries or been in some place where a mission was going on, that people just love you in the Lord. There's a different sense. And Paul really did want to go around to find out what might be happening, and he wanted to bless and then hoped to engage these folks to love others, especially those in Jerusalem who were suffering greatly; and financially, they were just destitute in many ways. Paul wrote, in the Romans 15 letter, of his desire to go to Rome. He mentioned it in the Corinthian letter as well. In fact, in the Corinthian letter (chapter 16 of the first letter) he said to them, "My plan is to stay through the winter here in Ephesus" (here, where he is now), but he sent his apostles ahead first. So Paul had plans to at least winter here before he would head out and around the horn there, so to speak. So we do see that the three years come pretty close with the time that he had spent on the way through the first time.

When he wrote the Roman letter, Paul said that his desire was always to go to Rome. It had been a dream of his for years. But his explanation, in chapter 1 of

Romans, was, "God's really called me to go where there's no gospel that's been preached," and there was a church already established in Rome. We can guess at who started it and how it had begun, but Paul really had little to do with that, so to speak. That was going before Paul was involved, and certainly he doesn't mention it at all. But he wanted to go, and he said, "I think that the Lord will now allow me to come." So from Paul's standpoint, here in Ephesus after being on the road ten or eleven, twelve years by now, here's a very optimistic guy. He has not had an easy go of it. He's a man in his 50's that has constant vision, knows no restrictions, doesn't look at the glass as half empty or hopeless in his plans. He doesn't settle in. He never does things the same way twice. He's a man who has bigger goals and plans than his life can afford. And I think that that's a pretty good attribute to have in serving the Lord. We oftentimes get to how little can we do and still be feeling good about things. Paul just dreamed huge dreams. "God, I want to go here, then I want to go there, I want to go over there, I want to check these guys." He didn't seem to have enough hours in the day to accomplish his work. He even mentions, when he goes to Rome or when he hopes to go to Rome, then he wants to go to Spain, and then he says, "And then I want to pass through to the islands and to the tribes." Not all those desires of Paul that he expressed in his epistles came to pass; a lot of places he never did get to go. But he dreamed about going. He was willing to go. He was hopeful and prayerful. He certainly loved the people he wanted to reach. Now Paul would get to go to Rome but not at all how he had planned. It would be an all-expenses-paid trip in handcuffs from the Roman government; an all-expenses-paid trip courtesy of the government who kept him in prison, but that would come at the end of what would be a three-year, 2500-mile trip across the world, so to speak, ending up in Jerusalem.

So we read here, in verse 22, that he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead, if you will, and he would catch up with them. Erastus - and if you take notes in your Bible - was the former treasurer of the city of Corinth; it's mentioned in Romans 16:23. He was a guy that came to the Lord through the ministry of Paul. He left a very prominent and well-paying job, if you will, being saved, to head for the mission field. So here's a guy that left a successful, worldly existence to put himself in the crosshairs of the Roman government, of the Jews, of the Judaizers, and of everyone else who didn't think being a Christian was a good idea; it was just about everyone. And he joined Paul. Paul was, like I said, going to stay here a little bit longer than the others; maybe as much as nine months longer. We don't know that for sure. We do know, from verse 29 in this chapter, that some of Paul's traveling companions were also still in Ephesus. So Paul was traveling with a bunch of guys at

this point. They're not all so easily identifiable in terms of what they were doing, but they are mentioned, if you will, by name. Luke is led here, though, in our chapter to give us a very detailed account of a riot that took place in the town soon after these two men of God, these servants of Paul, leave; and it is instigated by a union leader who is stopped eventually by a high-ranking government official. If you know anything about Paul, and he's been here a long time now - and there hasn't been much trouble, you know if there's trouble, he's probably in the middle of it somewhere. And he certainly is with this one.

So we read, in verse 23, and here's the time definition, "And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For 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, 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.' " I like the fact that Dr. Luke takes a city-wide riot that involves thousands of people, and he writes (in verse 23) a small or little commotion broke out. Well, he calls it "a great commotion," but a commotion isn't trouble; it's just noise, right? It sounds to me like a full-on riot, and you could die. And it certainly sounded that way when you read the rest of the statement. I guess inevitably, if you live in this world and you want to preach Jesus, sooner or later the world that you try to reach and you are going to clash. Right? The warfare is for the souls of men. There is a devil, there's a world, there's flesh, and there's the God that we serve who has filled us with His Spirit. So getting out to do it, and you can keep peace, and you can be civil, and you can speak quietly, and you can certainly be careful in how you go sharing, but eventually, sooner or later, there is going to be this collision.

And the collision here was between the gospel that was having a great effect (remember back in verse 19, they were burning the books to their pagan gods and enchantments and all) and the fact that all of Asia was now considering the gospel of Jesus because of Paul and his men and his ministry. So, the complaint was from a union leader, this fellow, an organizer - Demetrius, a silversmith. And if you read carefully what you read here, you immediately understand that his complaint was not religious. He threw that in at the end. His complaint was financial. "If this

keeps going, we're gonna go broke. You know we've made a pretty penny making these gold statues of our great Diana, the one we love, whose magnificence we don't want to see destroyed. However, man, it's gonna hurt our pocketbook." So at least God tells us that the opposition here might have couched it in religious terms, but their main complaint was not religious; it was financial. The stir was, verse 23, about "the Way." What a great name for the gospel message that was going out. Jesus said (John 14:6), "I am the Way," and the early church took that as a name for themselves. It is often used in the Bible by the enemies of God; chapter 9:2, you find it used again. Not just a part of life, but the Way of life. It's a great title. You know, you're not a Christian on Wednesdays at 7:00; you're a Christian every day. Right? You're one who is to walk with God. So, Jesus is the first, and He is the only Way.

Notice that, in his gathering of these laborers from similar occupations - as he tries to rally the labor unions (which there were plenty of in Ephesus at the time), he said to them, "You know about this Paul, you know about the gospel, you know about the Way that is being preached. You realize everyone is hearing it, and we are losing money out our pockets daily because of this man." I don't know if you could have a better compliment. Right? That the world starts criticizing the fact that you, going out to share, are now the cause of idolaters going broke. It's a cool story, and the head of the guild of silversmiths, who calls a union meeting, informs his members that, "Either Christianity has to be stopped or we're gonna go broke." That's his concern. By the preaching of the Word of God, thousands of people were turning from this dead, lifeless metal object to a living God. It was happening everywhere. Three years in one place and this is the result that Paul could find. People realized that God loved them, that He sent His Son to die for them, that they could respond in faith to Him, that He was now come to dwell in them. And, like I said, it wasn't just the Ephesians. All throughout Asia. And just look there on the map of all of those cities. In all of those areas. These are where all the seven churches of the book of Revelation are - in this area. All of these churches established because someone was preaching the Word of God (in verse 20) that "grew mightily and prevailed." It was God's Word that was making the difference. Revival was in full swing. In Ephesus, the result was being felt in the idol-making industry. They were losing patrons. They were losing money. Profits were down. Stock splits were necessary to raise capital. First-quarter losses were at a record according to the Wall Street Journal in Ephesus. The bond makers' bond ratings were dropping like lead weights. Everything was going against them because of the preaching of some folks who loved Jesus. Demetrius and others who were made

wealthy by their idol income, living affluent lives, were now in real jeopardy of losing it all. And I'll tell you what - that bonfire from last week hadn't helped either. It just reaffirmed that Paul had gotten under the skin of people. They were being touched and changed.

In fact, by the time we get to verse 29, the whole city will come together at the amphitheater to chant and yell and scream. And it's not just "a great commotion," Luke! It's a crazy riot. It is amazing for me to think that the body of Christ and the gospel of Jesus can have this kind of influence. But it sure gives me great hope. Because a lot of times we see things were filling the city with idolatry. I mean, this was a terrible place to be, and yet, just a few years later, everything's changed. I don't know how many people you have.....I'll just ask you, and you can answer for yourself.....how many people - this year - have you prayed with to receive the Lord? You personally. Or how many people have you - this year - looked them in the eye and said, "Look, let me tell you how you can get to heaven"? And if you're not doing that, why are you not doing that? We have this great opportunity to have the Lord use us to make a difference in the society in which we live. It's not enough to just stand around and point fingers and say, "I don't like this!" or, "The world's going to hell in a handbasket!" It might be so, but you're put in the world, man, to reach out with the love of Jesus. He's powerful! So, speak up and step out.

Now, like I said, this silversmith - Demetrius - was not so crass as to speak about money (because that is what he cared about), but he cloaks it (especially in verse 27) with these feigned religious words of concern regarding the temple of Diana and her honor. And to be honest with you, it was the religious aspect that stirred up the furor of the people. Most of them weren't in the profit line; they didn't make money. They made donations to these silversmiths. But most of the folks had a genuine, though very misguided, allegiance to these idols. So he didn't appeal to their money because he was a rich guy anyway; he appealed to their religious way of life, which stirred them up, which caused the uproar. And the group of merchants was on board with him, and the crowd went berserk and began to stir things up. There will always be those, especially amongst those religious folks, that will seek to gain wealth at the expense of the religious convictions of others. I've never been in any more religious place than Rome, I don't think. I've never seen more things sold in the name of Jesus in my life. "Jesus junk," I called it. But it is the exploitation of people's religious devotion, even if it's misplaced, and you find the same thing here. The exploiters will come to gain for themselves; it's not a new

and novel idea. So, in Ephesus, the sale of idols was falling while the church attendance was rising, and the work of the Holy Spirit was on the move.

We were in Wales ten or fifteen years ago - helped start a Calvary Chapel in a couple of places in Wales. They're still there, they're doing well. But there was a Welsh revival in 1901. I don't know if you are aware of it or not. It was fueled under the anointed preaching of a guy named Robert Murray McCheyne, and he was a young guy, and the Holy Spirit fell upon this man's life. And he began to preach, and by the time he was done, every tavern and pub in Wales closed. They closed. They didn't close because the owners of these pubs didn't want income; they closed because no one was showing up. In fact, for a period of two and a half years, if you go anywhere where you can find the Welsh daily newspaper - look it up, if you will, online - every morning, on the front page of the paper, were the names of the people that gave their lives to Christ. Hundreds and then thousands and pages of people that were getting saved. It was a genuine Welsh revival. It was an amazing work of God. How many anti-alcohol messages did McCheyne preach? The answer is zero. How many times did he go out of his way to speak to someone about the evil of going to the taverns on the Lord's day? He never mentioned it. Real people were being touched with the Spirit of God and saved and filled with the Spirit. And their lifestyles changed so that they lost interest in the appeal of the world. It's exactly what's going on here. The worst thing you can do is preach against something. You'll wear yourself out. There're so many things to preach against! You'll have a book full of "preach against" stuff, but it won't help anyone. You start preaching for Jesus, and God gets ahold of the heart, you don't have to worry about how they're gonna turn out; they'll turn out just fine. God changes the individual. So, another reason to not get involved with politics from the pulpit, I guess.

But here in Ephesus, with their idol worship, I'll tell you what; the same solution for our culture - for drug use, for pornography, for gang violence, for murder, for abortion - I'll tell you what the answer is. It isn't preaching against something; it's preaching Jesus to the hearts of man. And if enough people get touched, then you get this - you get the effect of the godliness of men and the work of God's Spirit in the life of the culture. The only way it works. The only way it can ever work. Unfortunately, we've gotten so far away from having our hope in Christ that we will join every little protest group around because we think somehow that's gonna help. That's not gonna help. It won't help. Because nobody preached against Demetrius; they just preached for Jesus, and God was able to use them. Jesus, alone, can

change lives, and if enough lives get changed, a culture gets changed, and the users will find no takers. The sin-peddlers will find no customers, and that's really the way that it should be. I'm sure some of you came out of some pretty interesting places where you spent your time and money, and you don't go there anymore; you're in church during the week. What's wrong with you people?! You're worshipping with a bunch of high school kids leading (the high school worship team led worship before tonight's study), and we couldn't be happier. God has changed our lives. He did it here as well. People need to just come to Christ. We should engage ourselves, more than anything else, in making sure that gospel gets out to others. Paul brought an entirely different solution and approach to the needs of the culture than the social gospel people or the political program people do today. I had a guy call this week and say, "Well, I was down at this other church, and they had a guy running for office, and why don't you have him at your church?" And my answer was really simple. "He didn't die for my sins. I'm gonna preach Jesus and that's it. You want more than that, you're not gonna be able to be happy here because we're not gonna do more than that. Can't do it. Can't do it." I'm going to heaven because of Christ, and He's the solution that you find here as well. So, Demetrius goes to these men, he talks to them about the latest trends, he gives them financial losses couched in religious rhetoric, and then they go out to stir up the crowds, religiously, for the sake of their monetary interest.

So we read, in verse 28, "Now when they heard this," (the group, the union guys) "they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions." Chanting jewelers hit the streets. Some joined by others caught up in the commotion. I don't know if you've ever been to a protest. But if there's a group of 500 protesters, I guarantee you 450 of them don't know why they're there. (Laughing) Someone's organized and everyone kind of shows it's just the way mass mobs work. So, everyone's up in arms, they're chanting. That's the thing. If you're gonna protest, you gotta chant. So they're chanting, and now they grab a couple of guys that they identified as being with Paul. Don't know much about these folks. We do know a little bit about them. But Gaius was saved in Corinth; he was the head of the synagogue there, you might remember, until he met Christ. But anyway, these two guys - Aristarchus and Gaius - were with Paul. They had come from Macedonia, across the Aegean Sea, on the other side of the pond, so to speak, and they had been traveling with Paul. Well, they were grabbed. And I love the fact that just in these chapters, Luke doesn't spend a lot of time on one thing;

months pass, but he gives us little information. It seems like a lot of people were traveling with Paul. He left Luke in Philippi, he had Barnabas and John Mark out in ministry, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him, there were two guys here that were grabbed. In the next few verses, we'll read about countless other disciples and all. Paul knew a lot of people and seemed to pour his life into a lot of them as well, served with many.

Notice the word "theater" here. And "they rushed into the theater." There is a huge area at the mount of Mount Pion, as it is called, that is about 500' in diameter, and it can seat (today in the ruins) 25,000 people. It's a huge place; it is larger than Staples Center, it is larger than the Honda Center. That's a lot of folks to put outside, and that was a place built there where, in the years that would follow, many Christians would be thrown to the lions. It is remarkably preserved. If you go on a tour of the churches of the book of Revelation, you will be absolutely disappointed with six of the seven places. There's very little ruins left. You'll see greater ruins in Jerusalem or in the Galilee. But you go to Ephesus, there's nothing like it in the world. Unbelievable. Standing, the streets, the marketplaces. Amazing. Amazing place. And this theater is standing there as well. So we know that Paul and, at least, the chanters gathered inside this theater. We took our group there last year in Turkey. If the Lord allows us to go back, we'll take you there if you want to go.

But mob psychology is a pretty dangerous thing. When people start chanting and getting.....I don't know if you've watched some of the videos coming out of Portland this last week and the fights in the streets; it doesn't take much to get knocked out if you just don't have eyes in the back of your head. People do in mobs what they'll never do on their own because they don't feel any liability. "We're all just I was there. I didn't really do anything." They're always egged on by others. So this is a riot behavior, a mob mentality. Notice verse 29. It says the whole city "was filled with confusion."

So maybe it's a little shocking, in verse 30, when you read, "And when Paul wanted to go in to the people," (I like Paul - he's just gonna take 'em all on) "the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends," (powerful men) "sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater." Paul has a natural courage that I just.....it frightens me and excites me all at the same time. I can relate to him not being sensible when it comes to things he's passionate about. On the other hand, this is a crazy idea. But he's a loyal friend.

If you have a friend in Paul, you need never worry. He'd make a great friend. He would risk everything for your benefit. So Paul needs the church leaders as well as the political leaders to, "Don't do it, man! This is not the way it's gonna go." And they had to restrain him, and some wealthy rulers who knew Paul finally convinced him to not go in there. It's interesting to me that the fanaticism in the streets and the wealthy homes of the financially.....aristocrats.....the gospel reached both. The common folks from the streets and then the rich aristocrats, the rulers in town, all came together - having a bond in Christ, if you will. It always works that way. The gospel works for everyone the same.

We read, in verse 32, "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." Perfect definition of a mob. No longer chanting together. Now they're yelling, the emotions are growing, people are hanging around, they're lookin' for trouble. It just.....it's a dangerous place to be, and I will tell you if you're ever around, just.....We were in Paris. My wife and I were in Paris by ourselves one day, walking down the street, and we saw these marchers and this tear gas coming our way, and we were stuck. And the little storefront was closed, and we backed up and just watched it all go by and quickly left. There's no way to feel comfortable when people are just looney toons, all of them together. But Paul wants to go in and fight. Well, here's the situation. They're nuts! Everybody's screaming one thing, somebody's screaming another. Here's what Paul gets into when he's been ministering the gospel.

Verse 33, "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' " Imagine how many times they said that in two hours! Alexander. Alexander was not a nice man. I say that because I've read the rest of the Bible. Years later, when Paul was in jail in Rome waiting to be executed by Nero, he wrote his last letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4). And Timothy was warned by Paul of the difficulties that this fellow had put upon Paul and his ministry. That's when Timothy was pastoring this church now that Paul had been arrested. At one time, it seems like (1 Timothy 1:20) he seemed to be a guy that at least professed faith in Christ; that this Alexander guy started off hanging out at the church, but he soon went otherwise. In any regard, this guy was wise, full of the gospel. Paul said to Timothy, "I've suffered greatly at his hands" (2 Timothy 4:14). He tried to quiet the crowd but, being a Jew in a

mostly Greek place again, the mob united in cheering against him. Imagine a group of people standing together, even sitting down in this theater, for two hours. I was looking through the internet, and I actually went to look for were there ever places that people just stood and chanted for two hours. So I ran into a story from 1960-1961 when the Houston Oilers (you remember those guys? - they are today the Tennessee Titans, but they were the Houston Oilers in the 60's) were the AFC football champs when George Blanda (maybe those of you that are older remember) was their quarterback as well as their kicker. In the year 1960-1961, when they won the AFC, 75,000 people showed up at the Astrodome in Houston - not to watch a game because there was no game - to chant for two hours, "We love you, Big Blue!" Two hours. Now these are football fans. I'm not a baseball fan, but I love the last couple of Dodger games. I stayed up late last night, and they won again today. So, go Dodgers! But that won't get you to heaven either. (Laughing) But I love the enthusiasm. People get excited, right? I think baseball's boring. But not in the playoffs. That's a lot of fun. That's why I go to hockey. That can't ever be boring. But I thought about this stadium with 75,000 people chanting for two hours, "We love you, Big Blue!" Really? I would give everything I own to find the church willing to do that with Christ, to find that kind of excitement and enthusiasm for Jesus - the One who bled on a cross so that we might live forever, our only hope. The problem is, as you get older cynicism kicks in, and cynicism is a gift that grows with age. You just get disappointed so often that you just become a cynic. I think I have to fight cynicism now. But I would love to think that the church would want to show up and just cheer Jesus' name. They'll do it for football. They did it for a metal statue that couldn't save herself. We need some excitement, guys, for the Lord who loves us.

Verse 35 tells us, "And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: '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?' " The city clerk would have been an important man. He would have been responsible for keeping the financial and taxation records of the cities. He would be the official liaison between Ephesus and the Roman provincial authorities. He would have been a smart guy, a political guy. And apparently he was influential enough to shut up a big crowd, "Hey, knock it off!" And he makes several salient, I guess, arguments for a big crazy bunch of people, a crowd. He starts off by complimenting their gods. "Who doesn't know that we're the guardian city of this great goddess and the image of her that fell from Zeus?"

Verse 36, " 'Therefore, since these things cannot be denied,' " (really?!) " 'you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.' " So he starts by giving lip service to this goddess. And by the way, they believed, and you can see it in the museum there as well, that this black stone that "fell from Jupiter" (Jupiter is the Roman equivalent of Zeus) - it was very grotesque looking. They said, "This is Diana, this is her. She fell down from Zeus. We all know that's our goddess. We're here to protect this ugly lookin' stone. Stay back. It's the stone. It's ours. Everyone knows that. You can't deny that." Okay. Not as smart as I thought you were. "But, look, if we know that, we shouldn't be acting the way that we have."

Verse 37, " 'For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.' " Back down to earth, he deals with Demetrius. He gives him a cold stare, I suspect. He looks at these two disciples that had done nothing wrong, had said nothing amiss regarding Diana. And maybe that's the lesson that we can drive home before we quit tonight - and that is this: you can minister Jesus without offending local false religions, people who are wayward in their understanding, or folks that are just absolutely nuts - they're worshipping these images. But somehow, of them - these two that were with Paul - the politician says, "They haven't offended anyone, they haven't blasphemed our goddess." Well, I think the contemporary Christian might very well have been preaching against Diana for a long time, and he'd have been guilty of that. But here're guys with Paul - almost there two and a half years - and they were able to say of Paul, "He hasn't offended us in terms of going after our gods." He might have offended you in terms of preaching his God, but nothing else. He preached for Christ, not against something. And I think if we'll do that, we'll get a lot further along with accomplishing God's will than we ever will trying to find the pet sin we want to preach against. "Oh, I'm against that." "Well, I'm against that." "Well, this really rubs me the wrong way." Great. Preach Christ. It's our calling and our pleasure to be able to do that. He preached Christ; people were saved. He preached Jesus, and wicked books were burned. He preached Christ, and they began to discard these lifeless idols. If you preach Jesus, people's lives can be cleaned up. I would say - I'd go this far. I'd say Paul preached a positive message most of the time. He really just brought the message of life - forgiveness, mercy. God help us to focus on that rather than preaching against something else because I'll tell you what. Whatever you're preaching against, that isn't the truth that sets

men free. Jesus' dying and resurrection - that sets men free. And whatever you're preaching against, that's a poor substitute for the good news of Christ. You're laying your hand on something that's weak when you could be laying your hand on the Lord, who is strong. So, he turns to these rebels, and he says to them, "If you've got a beef, go to court. Go present your case. If you think that, from a financial standpoint," (I think he knew what they were up to) "you're suffering loss, then let's deal with it legally and honestly and in a way that isn't this riotous approach."

In fact, he ended by saying, in verse 40, " 'For 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.' And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly." And the people went home, they took off. God, here, I think intervenes for Paul and the boys, and the result was no reprisals. Erastus was gone, Timothy was gone. But there were still an awful lot of people there that could have gotten in trouble.

So, with that behind him, Paul is ready to leave Ephesus and head out to (on your map) Macedonia and Achaia. Two years in Corinth, three more years here - these two towns literally consumed five years of Paul's fifteen years of ministry, let's say, on the road. I mean, they were the lynchpins of reaching out to Europe and to Asia, if you will, and it might be the best overview for evangelism and the church growth that God desires. In both Corinth and in Ephesus, Paul went to the synagogue first - where people had a biblical background. When that didn't work, he moved from the establishment to a private place - to a home in Corinth, to a lecture hall in Ephesus. Both places, in both cities, Paul met often with the church. There are a lot of people, even in our church, who believe that going to church for a half an hour on Sunday constitutes growth. It won't. I don't think it will. I think that the more you spend time with the Lord, the better you'll be in the Lord. But, needless to say, Paul met with everybody on a regular basis in both cities, for years. Turned out a lot of pastors and leaders and servants. Luke uses two words to describe this chapter in Paul's ministry. In verse 8, he said, Paul was there "reasoning." The word "reasoning" is the word dialogue or just literally answering questions. And in verse 26 of this chapter, we read the word "persuading," which is a word that means to argue for the sake of convincing someone of your position. So you answer the questions, and then you present arguments that will get people off of their hesitancy to come to the Lord. Paul wasn't afraid to just go, "Well, how would you believe that? Why? Let's go over it again." He reasoned, he

persuaded. It was serious. He believed it wholeheartedly. He wasn't afraid to entertain questions or the doubts of others. He didn't demand that people just believe, but he persuaded them with the Scriptures. "Come on! Just believe it, man." "Well, why?" "I don't know. Just believe it." Not really very helpful. Paul did his part. He writes to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Peter writes to the scattered saints, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). I mean, we have a responsibility to be able to reason and to persuade. If you can't do that, go to work on that. I was a young Christian, and I took this idea of witnessing to people seriously. I'd practice on my refrigerator. I'd sit in front of my refrigerator and imagine questions and then try to answer them. I had little notes in my Bible, where I had #1, and then under it, it would say, "Go to page 46," and that's where #2 verse would be. I had cheat notes in my Bible, so you probably thought I was really smart. "Well, in other words," (Pastor Jack flips through the pages of his Bible) "and then it says in the book of Mark....." I didn't know. I had it marked down! But it convinced me. I think you've got to work on it. Work on it. Have an answer for the hope that lies within you. And Paul did. Those who got saved in this time of revival were saved because they had a good knowledge of the Scriptures, they had evidence to see it in the lives of others. In three years here in Ephesus, all of Asia had heard, and the economy and the direction of the culture had changed simply because people came to know the Lord personally. In five years, two churches. Amazing. But the growth was slow. It was a grind. It was teaching and studying and believing and praying. The flock was established upon the Word of God, and we need to do that, too. It's not going to be easy, but it's the way God works. It's written in the narrative of the early church that God wants us to know. Paul had a wonderful example for ministry for all of us.

What's not mentioned at all here - and if you just read here, you might miss it - was the climate in which this work went forth. And you will discover that. For example, especially in the Corinthian letters, Paul went out of his way to kind of define what he was up against. He said, "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus," he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:32. "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." That's his viewpoint. "What advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise" (I put my life on the line, but if the gospel that I'm preaching is not true, and Jesus didn't rise, then we're of all men most miserable), " 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! " But he said, "I fought with the beasts here." That's his opinion to the Corinthians

of what was going on here. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:8 to them, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." This wasn't a cakewalk. It reads so pretty. Oh, three years. Everything went good until the riot. Not the way Paul saw it at all. God help us to be as diligent for His glory in our ministries, even under less than ideal circumstances. Because Paul was in a place of not ideal circumstances at all. It was a grind, it was hard. He was rejected, and so will we be. But the fields are white, and the best way to reach the world is to teach the Bible, have answers for our faith, share it boldly, rely on the Scriptures, look for the Holy Spirit to convict, and then be available. That's exactly the way it worked in the 1st century. "I wish we could have what happened in the days of Paul." Oh, we can. We can just do the same thing.

Next week, we're going to take seventeen verses of chapter 20 - the all-night Bible study in 45 minutes or less. Next week. Don't you all fall out of a window next week. (Laughing) By the way, just for fun, go look up what Eutychus means - the guy who fell out of the window, he was named appropriately.

Shall we pray?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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