



LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

TEXT: Acts 19:1–31

MAIN IDEA: The gospel impacts our hearts in a way that brings true repentance in some, and extreme opposition in others.

LEADERS:

- Family Dedication is coming up on November 13th. If you or someone you know has a child or children under five who have not yet been dedicated, here's the opportunity! Sign up is available on the Digital Bulletin.
- We have a night of worship coming up on November 20th at 7:00 pm at the Totowa campus. All are welcome.
- Registration is open for the Winterblast winter student retreat. Niiiiice. This year, they'll be at Camp Orchard Hill, January 20–22. Registration is open via the digital bulletin until November 18.

GETTING STARTED:

- Watch this week's Community Extras Video.
 - **Icebreaker:** Name a musical artist you used to think was awesome but now think is terrible.
 - **Opener:** What stood out to you from this week's sermon?
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Acts 19 gives us a glimpse of Paul's three-year ministry in the city of Ephesus (AD 52–54), the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Luke, the author of Acts, gives us a condensed version of the events that transpired, and several additional details can be filled from Paul's various letters that were written from there—such as an additional trip across the sea to Corinth and possibly an imprisonment that occurred after the events of this chapter (see below). By the time he left, a thriving church was established there, which would become one of the most prominent centers of Christianity, pastored, at least for some time, by Paul's protégé Timothy.

THE GOSPEL COMES TO EPHESUS

Read Acts 19:1–7.

It is unclear what was and wasn't understood by the twelve disciples of John the Baptist whom Paul encountered when he first arrived at Ephesus. We know that John preached repentance from sin in anticipation of the coming Messiah, whom he openly declared to be Jesus. John's disciples had at least two interactions with Jesus' disciples, and among them there was confusion, owing to the fact that Jesus had not assumed his role as an earthly king, while John wallowed in prison. When they express ignorance of the Holy Spirit, this probably does not mean that they are unaware of his existence, since John preached that Jesus would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16), and at his baptism the Spirit visibly descended on Jesus. Bearing all this in mind, it seems likely that they are unaware of the centrality of the cross and his resurrection, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, and the outpouring of the Spirit on all believers.



  Give an example of someone today who understands important truths about God and Jesus, and yet is ignorant about God's forgiveness through him, and the Holy Spirit's empowerment that comes to those who trust him.

 How would you explain the gospel to someone like this?

Read Acts 19:8–10.

After three months of reasoning from the Word of God in the synagogue to people who stubbornly persisted in unbelief, one can imagine that it may have been tempting to water down his message, to appeal to people who didn't see eye to eye with him. But he didn't. Instead, he changed his location and continued to preach faithfully for two years, which eventually resulted in the spread of the gospel throughout the entire province of Asia.

  Why is it important for Christians to not modify the message of Jesus in order to make it more palatable to unbelievers? How does this differ from contextualization, which, we have seen, is entirely wise and biblical (see Acts 17:22–34)?

THE SONS OF SCEVA

Read Acts 19:11–16.

 Things go pretty poorly for these guys. What did the sons of Sceva do that was so wrong? Isn't it a good thing to cast out demons?

 Where in your life are you tempted to use the name of Jesus for your own personal gain?

Read Acts 19:17–20.

Leaders: This is a key New Testament passage that shows us that magic and other forms of spiritism are antithetical to the gospel. See also Deuteronomy 18:9–14.

The believers in Ephesus stepped forward and burned their magical books. This was a powerful way to sever ties with their old way of life. First, it was costly. Books were very valuable in the ancient world, and Luke even tells us their value—fifty thousand pieces of silver (a piece of silver was a day's wage for a laborer; you do the math). Second, it was permanent. They didn't store them away on shelves, with the possibility of returning at a later day "for old times' sake." And third, this made it so that no one else could pick up these books to be led astray by them.

 Why does God care about whether or not we practice magic and divination?

 What in your life is displeasing to the Lord that you need to sever in a radical way? In the Ringwood sermon, Ryan Franey highlighted that this is evidence to the world that we have something better.



OPPOSITION TO THE TRUTH

Read Acts 19:21–27.



What parts of our culture does the gospel challenge in such a way that it stirs up opposition to the message of Jesus? How should Christians respond to these things?

Read Acts 19:28–34.

The crowd that formed in verses 23–27 has now become an irrational mob. Luke tells us they were so confused that “most” of them didn’t even know why they were there. And when one of Paul’s companions, trying to calm them down, is identified as a Jew, they simply drown him out with a senseless slogan, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”



When have you seen an irrational response to the gospel, and how does God want you to react?

Read Acts 19:35–41.

In this paragraph, the town clerk, though (apparently) not a believer himself, is nevertheless a voice of reason, much like Gamaliel was among the Jewish leadership in Acts 5:33–39.



Where have you seen unbelieving voices of reason in our day, and how can Christians use these voices for the advancement of the gospel and the good of our world?



When we do find voices of reason, what considerations should we keep in mind to maintain a spirit of discernment and wisdom?

Leaders: At the beginning of this lesson, we said that Paul may have ended up in prison as a result of this uproar. If this is true, then Luke does not mention it, which is fine, since there is a lot he has chosen to leave out in his selective telling of events. Here are the clues that suggest this:

- *Luke only records two imprisonments in Acts: Philippi and Paul’s eventual house arrest in Rome. However, in 2 Corinthians 11:23, he boasts of “far more imprisonments,” which sounds like more than two.*
- *Paul wrote Colossians from prison, but he doesn’t tell us where. In it, he lists Aristarchus as a “fellow prisoner.” Here, in Acts 19:29, Aristarchus is one of two men dragged before the angry mob.*
- *It is likely that Paul wrote Philippians during the same imprisonment as Colossians. If we reconstruct the events that led to the writing of Philippians, it seems that at least four trips between Paul and Philippi are required, which is much more likely given an Ephesian imprisonment than the other candidate—Rome.*



PRAYER TIME

Praise God for the ways that he has brought about radical repentance in your life, and ask him for help in putting to death the sin that remains.

Pray for God's sustained help for you to be faithful to his Word, even when doors seem shut, and even when it means opposition.