

There is a Disturbance!
Acts 19:21-27

We have just witnessed many who through the preaching and teaching and through the name and for the glory of Christ really repent of their wicked ways burning many of their books of various different spells and incantations. And there were many more who came to Christ, witnessed these changed lives and the powerful transformation that comes through Jesus Christ.

Paul had spent quite a while in Ephesus, but he began to sense that it was time to leave. Look at verse 21, **“Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”** Paul resolved in the Spirit to leave. Now this could mean God had given him direct revelation, or it could mean that through the Spirit he was always mindful of his ministry entrusted to him to take the gospel to others who had never heard. He sought to go through the Greek provinces Macedonia and Achaia, no doubt to receive a collection of funds for the poor saints at Jerusalem who were suffering from years of opposition and now a famine. With the rise of Gentiles in the church, and the direction of meeting away from synagogues into house churches, the tension with the church at Jerusalem was high. No doubt Paul hoped this gift would display a oneness in the gospel. From there he hoped to go into Rome. There was already a church at Rome, but Paul’s sights are further than Rome. Listen to what he writes in Romans 15:24, **“I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.”** There is always more to do for our great Lord.

And from this point onward in the Book of Acts, the history of Paul is taken up with his desire to go to Rome. He will end up there but not the way he certainly planned. Now look at verse 22, **“And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”** Timothy and Erastus would prepare for Paul’s coming, and no doubt take up or encourage the collection for the church at Jerusalem. Paul always had helpers and co-labourers.

And now, in what has been a relative time of ease, peace, and even spiritual prosperity in the church at Ephesus we see the rise of opposition, and it is that advance in the gospel that causes the disturbance or opposition. Eliphaz speaks in Job 5:7, and he gets many things wrong in his speech before Job, but he does get this right, **“but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”** We often want to question why we have troubles and adversity, and the easiest answer is because we were born. As sparks fly from any fire, so the troubles of every single person inhabit his or her life. No one escapes troubles. But the thing about this passage of Scripture, the believer has a unique set of troubles and trials, and that is trials for his faith in Christ. And as you look at this passage of Scripture, and the reason for the disturbance or the rise of opposition against these believers is because of nothing they were doing wrong, but everything they were doing right. It was because of their following Christ.

And I think that is what confuses us so many times. We think if we are the right type of people than we will be blessed by the Lord, and everything in our marriages, family, church, society will go great. Even though the Word of God promises

opposition, and a particular opposition — an opposition of us living, celebrating, and announcing our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:12, “**Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**” We know many promises of God, but do we know this promise? You might have a greater, fuller life with Christ, you might have a greater joy than you ever had, you might have a greater hope than ever but you will not have an easier life. All who love Christ, want to follow him and make much of him will suffer persecution. We get confused because we just don’t hear or believe what God says about our life.

So in the relative calm and peace of Ephesus this disturbance seems to come from nowhere, but it has been seething underneath the surface for sometime. There just needs to be a match that is lit to the gasoline. But as we study the opposition, it allows us to understand the opposition we face, why people hate Christianity, the fallacy of much of that hatred, but also how to respond in the way that glorifies Christ. Because God is giving us in this increasing hostile world a greater opportunity to shine the brightness and glory of Christ. And that light shines the brightest in the darkness. So I want us to look at this opposition and forearm us with any opposition we are facing today with none other than gospel light.

1. We need to be ready or prepared for opposition in our lives. V. 23

I think it is always good to do inventory or introspection of how we do things, and especially when problems and difficulties arise within the church and even outside the church. What are we doing right and what needs to change? But what exacerbates our trials is that we are not ready for the trials in our life. We are not expecting them. Often people are shaken by it, the amount of hostility and opposition that comes through the preaching of the gospel. Some of the greatest opposition I have had personally through ministering the gospel have come during times of great advancement in the gospel. People’s lives are being changed and God is bringing in people to his family and kingdom. People in the church are encouraged, and we are ready for more of the same. But the problem is that Satan is a roaring lion, and he hates any advancement in Christ’s kingdom. And what exasperates this opposition is we are not prepared for it. We are right with God and everything will keep going.

So think of why and where this opposition occurs. Because look at the beginning of verse 23, “**About that time.**” This is an indicator when the opposition not only rose but came against the church and those who love Christ. It was when Paul had planted this church. It seems to have taken root. There were elders or pastors that had matured who are now able to take over the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. It was when Paul now set his sights on further fields of ministry. This is a time of rejoicing. But the real significance of this phrase, “About this time” is found up in verse 20 where it indicates what was happening in Ephesus, “**So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.**” Again, “the word of the Lord” is the gospel, it is the good news of Christ. This is not man’s word, but God’s word, the plan of our holy God! The gospel is his gospel. The word “increase” means spread, there was numerical growth, as more people left their idolatry and witchcraft, and trusted and followed Christ. It was like in Thessalonica where Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, “**For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had**

among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." And as we will see, this becomes the problem. The problem is not that the gospel was being preach, but it's advance and spread. A sizeable amount of the population has come to Christ, still a minority but a noticeable minority.

The word not only spread, but it **"prevailed mightily."** The meaning here is that it conquered or was effective in the hearts and lives of others. We saw that last week by these believers changing not only their allegiance, but their whole lifestyles. They got rid of their books. They didn't invest in the things that they did before. There was a whole new way of living where as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."** Their lives had changed, and therefore society began to change because the old was gone, and the new had come. The gospel prevailed mightily in each of their lives. Now that is the environment of this verse. That is what is talking place.

So read the verse again in that context, **"About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way."** Notice a couple of things here. One is the disturbance is not caused by any illegal or immoral activity. It is not caused by ignorant or hostile behaviour of believers, but it is caused by "the Way." This is how Luke describes Christianity because as Jesus said in John 14:6, **"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"** Jesus is the truth, and the life, against falsehood and deadness that is everywhere. But he is also the way, and the only way. Way speaks of a gate or access or route or path. How is Jesus the way? There is no other way to come into the presence of an all holy and all righteous God than through the sacrifice of Christ. So "the Way" is describing the church which is made up of those trusting in Christ, who is the Way. It is both a title of Christ and descriptive of those following him.

But that brings us to the second thing — the disturbance, because the cause of the disturbance is the Way. And notice Luke describes it as **"no little disturbance"** which is a means of describing it as a great disturbance. I don't think we give this much thought. Can you think of anything more disturbing to a worldly wise person than a believer who loves the Lord? You think of the things a person of the world loves, and then you think of the believer living next to him. His life speaks against everything that he might hold dear. Maybe life is found in materialism and the acquisition of more. Yet here they are giving away what they have, and even burning these valuable books. Life is found in as many relationships that you can have. But here is the Christian, who seeks a pure heart, delights in God, and rather than use others, prizes them as made in the image of God. Here are others talking about themselves, but the Christian walks in humility and talks about Christ and what he has done for a sinner like me. In an age of self-esteem being around a believer who loves the Lord is frustrating. Now imagine for the worldly wise person, that it is not just one Christian but several Christians who have this love for Christ and live for him every day.

Do you think that would be frustrating? Do you think it would cause a disturbance in the recesses of their heart where they do not want to be confronted about sin or the glorious merits of Christ? You see the reason for the persecution might be different. For the Jews earlier it was jealousy. In Philippi it was the response of

casting out the demon, in Lystra it was the denunciation of their paganism, but it always ends or is caused by “the Way” — the gospel of Christ, and not only gospel proclamation but also gospel living.

And think of that, because people are not applauding us today that through the Gospel, God has taken such sinful and unproductive lives and produces change and productive and righteous and loving lives. We certainly don’t go looking for opposition, but this opposition is not a negative. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 5:11-12, **“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** Why are we blessed? Because we are not standing in a faulty way but the success of that very message guarantees that in this world you will have tribulation. This disturbance is the outcome of true and authentic Christianity. So if we are truly living for him, we need to be ready. The more serious and the more zealous we are for Christ and living for him, the more there will be a response.

2. We need to see that adverse response to the gospel. Vv. 24-25.

It is surprising to have such a speech like this recorded in the Book of Acts from an unbeliever, but it is insightful to see that the reason he and the others of his guild reject and even act against Christianity has nothing to do with doctrine per se, but everything to do with wealth. It is incredible to see how the anger and hostility arises when people’s lives, and what they hold dear in the here and now are threatened. And there is no greater god in our world today among those who do not believe than the god of money or greed. Money and wealth make the same promises the gospel makes. It says security, joy, contentment, righteousness are found in what you have. Again, it is not money in and of itself but the love of money. It is incredible how so many think that they are free from the love of money, but money dominates their thoughts and worries. They worry about the economy or whether their wealth will last or what if this happens or that happens. They covet what others have and may even wonder why they struggle. They look with so much pride at what they have and measure themselves against those who have less. And it is intoxicating. Others dream and lust and crave the next purchase. But the god of money never is enough. Where has the love of money dominated your life, because you cannot love God and money?

Because we are introduced to a man named Demetrius in verse 24, **“For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen.”** Notice a few things about this man. First, he was a silversmith who made shrines or statuettes of Artemis. Artemis was the goddess of fertility, and the main goddess of that region. There was a huge temple in Ephesus that was one of the seven wonders of the world. The temple acted as a bank in the ancient world, and men of wealth wanting to protect their money deposited it in this temple for safe keeping. They would have religious festivals every year, and it attracted many pilgrims and tourists to the region. And the worship of this goddess was the economic engine of the city.

Now what Demetrius would do, would be to construct little statues of Artemis and sell them to the population and also those visiting the city. These were made of

silver. And they had a couple of purposes. One is that these little shrines acted as household gods to protect the family and also bring blessing to the family. The other purpose is they would take these statutes to the temple and offer them as an offering. There has been none of these silver statues found but that is not surprising because the priests would take them and melt down the silver and sell it for a profit.

But it is the next aspect that begins to bring in the problem, because look at how this verse ends, **“brought no little business to the craftsmen.”** It seems that Demetrius is bringing this work and business to the craftsmen. He might be the head of the guild. And notice as there was no little disturbance, here we read “no little business,” in other words it was very profitable. They made quite a bit of wealth.

So you can imagine his concern and their concern as far as the shrinking sale of these statuettes. Look at the next verse, **“These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.’** Now this is a masterful speech with one purpose, and that is to enflame passions in order to get rid of the obstacle that is threatening their trade. It seems that Christianity has become so popular that it is changing the whole of the society, including the economic fabric of that city. It was from this trade that they made quite a sizeable wealth, and there in is the problem. This whole speech is a call to retaliate against the very reason their business is suffering and take Christianity by its neck and strangle the life out of it.

I was up at a church outside of Quebec City that so-called held the hand of Anne, the supposed mother of Mary, mother of Jesus. It was encased in gold, and put on display for worshipers to bow before and pray. They had a place for buses to park, and pilgrims from all over came to this church and shrine. They had a gift shop, and you could buy various objects, and then after you bought those gifts celebrating the hand of this woman, you entered another room where a priest was, and he would bless those very items in order to bring blessing into your home. The selling of religion and the profiting from it is still big business. If you want to be protected and blessed, have these things in your house. Now what would the gospel do to a place like that?

This is such a distance from Jesus has done it all, and such a far distance from what we see in Ephesus. The believers burn their magic books, they stop buying religious tokens, and why? Because Jesus is all we need. We are totally righteous before God through Christ, kept and protected by him for every more. It as Paul says in Philippians 1:6, **“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”** Jesus is all I need! There is nothing else.

So in the face of this rising hostility what are a couple things we can take away from this passage? One is that Christianity is really this effective. It is really this life altering in one life after another where in the end it has the capacity and it does change society. Think of the startling reality of before and after of those who trusted Christ in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were**

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Did you hear that? Such were some of you. Think of the continued direction in that life, but think of the change that came. It came not because of who we are, but because you were washed, you were and are being sanctified, and you were justified by Christ through the Spirit.

And so often people wonder does Christianity do any good? Certainly it secures our future and that we will be with Christ in glory, but how about in the here and now? And the answer in Ephesus and everywhere authentic Christianity is preached and known is — yes! This is why there is persecution. Because many of those in this city are no longer, as that list says — idolaters, sexually immoral, greedy, drunks, or swindlers. If they were then there would be no rising opposition, but Christianity changed the fabric of the city. It should change the fabric of our lives. Folks, blessed are we when we are persecuted, opposed, maligned because of righteousness, because of the glorious transformation that has occurred in our lives.

And that brings us to second point, if the gospel is this effective, if faith in Christ is this transformational, then he can do so much more with your life, your marriage, your family. If Christ creates this great of a desire for him, we no longer need to be slaves to money or anything else. My plea is to look to him. The more we see him as believers the more the things of this earth lose their appeal, because there is a greater desire for Christ. This Jesus has changed the world. He has changed your world. In the face of all our trials, let him continue to change your world.