

Paul's Third Missionary Journey: the Riot at Ephesus--Acts 19:23-20:1

by J.R. Miller

The Gospel can have a significant impact on people's lives, leading them to stop worshiping idols and turn to purity, righteousness, and heaven, but it can also be opposed by those who benefit from sinful activities.

Scripture: Acts 19:23

Topics: "Courage in Adversity", "The Impact of the Gospel"

Description

J.R. Miller discusses the impact of the gospel during Paul's third missionary journey, particularly in Ephesus, where it clashed with the local economy centered around the worship of Diana. He emphasizes that while the gospel does not inherently oppose business, it does challenge sinful practices that conflict with Christian living. The riot incited by Demetrius highlights how the truth of Christianity can threaten profitable but immoral businesses, leading to opposition from those whose livelihoods depend on such practices. Miller also notes Paul's courage in wanting to defend his companions amidst the chaos, and the importance of having friends who support us in times of need. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the wisdom in the town clerk's advice to avoid rash actions, which can lead to regret and trouble.

Transcript

The gospel does not interfere with business--unless the business is sinful. When it is right, it is really a part of Christian living--as is attendance at prayer meetings. We may serve God as acceptably on Monday at our common work--as we do on Sunday in our religious worship. But there are certain kinds of business which do not harmonize with Christian living. If the business be sinful, we cannot be diligent in it--and at the same time be serving the Lord. The gospel made a great stir in Ephesus, it is said, because it was in conflict not merely with the worship of Diana--but with a profitable business which the worship of the goddess had built up. Wherever the gospel goes--it makes a great deal of stir. Wicked men do not like the gospel, because it interferes with their life, or with their methods of business.

This opposition to the gospel took an organized form in Ephesus. A man named Demetrius seems to have had a sort of monopoly of the 'Diana shrine business'. At least he was prominent among those who were engaged in this business. So he called a meeting of the workmen of his craft, and said to them, "Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth." Here we see at once the secret of the opposition to Christianity. Paul's preaching was damaging the business of these men. If he were allowed to go on

preaching, soon nobody would believe in the goddess or care to worship her--and the result would be that no more little shrines could be sold. Anything that touches men's pockets--is apt to be opposed by them. There are instances of this same spirit in our modern days. Note how the rum dealers of all grades, hate Christianity, because it preaches temperance and tries to rescue men from the power of alcohol. Christianity declares open war against all evil, especially against every influence that debauches and destroys human lives and wrecks homes, and destinies!

Unintentionally Demetrius pays a high compliment to the influence of Paul's preaching. He says to the men he is trying to stir up against the gospel, "Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all." Paul had made no attack on the business of these men--but he had proclaimed the truth of the one God, declaring that idols were no gods at all. This is the way Christianity does wherever it goes. It does not directly start crusades against certain men or certain evils--it merely proclaims the great truth of Christianity, and then lets these truths have their own legitimate effect.

Demetrius was greatly alarmed over the prospective result of the preaching of the gospel. He said there is danger "that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised." This temple was a splendid ornament--the pride and boast of the city. The argument of Demetrius, was that if Christianity were allowed to spread, that this temple would lose its splendor, and the city would be the sufferer. That is, he looked at the matter in a purely business way. Christianity would injure the fame and distinction of the city. He thought nothing about the people's souls. The gospel came to Ephesus, not to conserve heathen institutions--but to save the lost! It came to turn men from idols, and to lift them up to purity, righteousness and heaven. Yet the damage to business and the dimming of the fame of an idol--were greater interests in the eyes of the silversmith, than were all the blessings to the people's lives which the gospel brought to them.

The excitement was very great when Demetrius ended his speech. His fellow craftsmen who had heard his words were filled with wrath, and the whole city was filled with confusion! The meeting assumed a riotous form, and the men rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging some of Paul's companions with them. When Paul learned this, he was wanted to go into the theater himself. This incident gives us a glimpse of Paul's heroic soul. His companions and friends had been seized by the mob and dragged into the theater, while he was outside and kept in a secure place by other friends. But he was determined to share the danger of his friends and speak in their defense. It took sublime courage, thus to desire to face the mad crowd, when he knew that they might tear him to pieces the moment he faced them. But the spirit of Paul was equal to it, and only the restraint of his friends kept him from rushing in before the furious mob. When others are brought into trouble on our account--we should desire either to rescue them, or to share the trouble with them.

Others also besides Paul's companions saw his danger and sought to rescue him. "And some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater." It seems strange that any of these distinguished men, so high in rank, should care enough for this Christian preacher in this heathen city, to make any effort to save him. It seems still stranger, to read that these men were his friends. Yet it only shows that God can raise up friends for his people, wherever they may be.

God had brought about these friendships before this trouble arose, so that his servant might be helped in the hour of need. In like manner Joseph and Nicodemus, two rich and influential men, were provided in

advance as friends of Jesus, though only secretly, so that when he had died on the cross his body might be by them rescued from dishonor, and might receive fitting and loving burial. We need not fear if we are God's true and faithful children--that he will ever fail to raise up friends for us in our hour of need, wherever we may be.

The counsel given by the town clerk at this time, which led to the quieting of the mob, is very worthy of our thought. He said to them, "You ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly." That was good advice that day, and this town clerk showed much wisdom by the way he handled this mob.

But the counsel is one that we may all with profit take to ourselves and put down among our life maxims. "Do nothing rashly." Rash people are forever getting themselves and their friends into trouble. They are continually doing things today--which tomorrow they regret and wish they had not done. A great many of us have tongues that are always speaking rash words. We make rash promises that we fail to keep. We speak rashly when we are angry and then lose friends by our hasty sayings. Then many of us are continually doing rash things which cause any amount of trouble. We make rash bargains, and enter into rash speculations and spend money rashly. A very large percentage of the blunders many of us make, are due to rashness--and could be prevented if we could always stop to think before we speak or act. It would be well for all of us--to take counsel from the town clerk of Ephesus frequently!

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