

Paul in Ephesus - Riot

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- [0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 4th of July 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman.
- His sermon is entitled Paul in Ephesus, Riot, and is from Acts chapter 19 verses 21 to 41. Amen. The world needs the gospel.
- The Apostle John said, Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. In Christ resides all the truth we need to face life.
- For Christ, who is the truth, holds the secrets of the universe and the nations as he holds the truth in our own lives and hearts. Jesus is the key to life.
- [1 : 20] He is the true revelation of things as they really are. This was demonstrated by his birth, his life, his miracles, his death and subsequent resurrection.
- And his work continues to be demonstrated by his invisible but real presence in the hearts of Christians throughout the world, even at this very moment.
- Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.
- What did Jesus mean when he said the truth will set you free? Truth is God's special revelation that has its heart and centre in the work of Jesus Christ.
- Such knowledge, born of revelation and experience, sets one free. And one is free when sin no longer rules over him or her, and when the word of God dominates their heart and life.
- [2 : 27] And one is free, therefore, not to do what he or she can do, but whatever they want to do, but to do when they agree to do what God wants them to do by the power of the risen Jesus.
- This is the same truth that Paul and his disciples taught in the city of Ephesus in the few years that they were there. Now as we've looked at the city of Ephesus over the past few weeks, we have learnt that the inhabitants of Ephesus were held in the bondage that led to death.
- Until Paul, the apostle Paul, came preaching the gospel of Jesus, Ephesus lacked the truth of God. The people were hostage to idolatry.
- Their sources of spiritual truth were witches and warlocks, magicians and idolaters. They were held captive by the chains of greed, superstition, immorality, fear, guilt.
- And emptiness. Ephesus was a city of wasted lives. Lives that were ruled by Satan and his demons. It was into this arena that Paul brought the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- [3 : 52] He first shared it in the synagogue and when his teaching was rejected, he rented the school of Tyrannus, which became the centre of his teaching for the next two years.
- The truth of God's word then began to tear down the strongholds of Satan, delivering a group of people out of the kingdom of darkness through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and bringing them into the kingdom of light.

Demons were on the run. Magic books were being burned. And verse 20 of chapter 19 tells us, The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Well, some amazing things happened in Ephesus. But this apostle, Paul, was not free from spiritual warfare during this time of ministry. He faced many, many hardships and adversaries.

First in Ephesus, then later on in Jerusalem, and finally in Rome. In his letter to the Ephesians, probably written from Rome, he would later say in chapter 6, and I'm reading a quote from the New American Standard Version, it says, Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth.

[5 : 10] When he wrote this letter to the Ephesians, Paul was thinking of a Roman soldier going into battle. And the soldier would first tuck his tunic under his girdle so as to leave his legs free and unimpeded for the battle.

Girding the loins then was one of the first things a soldier did in readiness for the battle. And the apostle was illustrating the point that as the Christian battles in the conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil, he girds up his loins by means of the truth of God.

Now in these verses 21 to 41, we will see the power of the truth of God on this hellish city of Ephesus. Now I do encourage you to follow along and let's begin by looking at verses 21 and 22.

Now after these things had happened, had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia and then to go on to Jerusalem. He said, After I've gone there, I must also see Rome.

So he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, that is to Europe, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia. Now in these opening verses, we find that Paul wants to go up to Jerusalem again after he's gone through Europe and so on.

[6 : 38] And this time he's wanting to go, taking with him to Jerusalem, a collection for the Jewish Famine Relief Fund, which he would have gathered in the Greek churches when he went over there.

Now he would go freely to Jerusalem at this time, but then he would be arrested and taken into chains to Rome. But for now, Paul remains in Ephesus for a time.

Now I've got some maps here and we're going to have a slideshow of Ephesus for just a moment to help us sort of picture it all. Can you all hear me?

Stand here. Good. I don't need the microphone anymore. And while Paul is in Ephesus, I'm going to use the word the enemy.

The enemy confronts him wearing a new disguise, as we'll see as we read on. And let's look at verses 23 through to 27. About that time, no little disturbance broke out concerning the way, that is, about Christianity.

[7 : 46] A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. These he gathered together with the workers of the same trade and said, Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business.

You also see in here that not only in Ephesus, but in almost the whole of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

And there is danger, not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.

As has been pointed out, the truth of the word of God was challenging the strongholds of Satan on all fronts in the city of Ephesus. But Satan was now going to strike back because the religious business at the temple of Artemis was having, if you like, a Black Monday.

Within the city stood this temple of Artemis, the mother of gods and people in Asia Minor. And this temple, as I spoke about a couple of weeks ago, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[9 : 13] The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a many-breasted woman who symbolised fertility and was carved out of, as legend goes, a black meteorite which the people there claimed had fallen from heaven.

As a result, a prosperous business had sprung up around this temple to serve the residents as well as these religious tourists who would congregate in Ephesus.

Now Demetrius, this local silversmith, made silver shrines of Artemis. And towards the end of Paul's teaching ministry in Ephesus, this man noticed a considerable decrease in business.

He gathered the local trade union members, as it were, and defined the problem. He gathers them all together. And in the past, they had a very good business in these silver souvenirs that they were creating.

And their prosperity depended upon this religious business. But it had fallen off in recent months. The fly in the ointment that Demetrius reasoned was the apostle Paul, who had taught that, in verse 26, God made with hands are not gods.

[10 : 36] And as a result, it turned away many potential customers. Now the two immediate results of this were that trade had fallen off. Thus was creating an economic crisis for the silversmiths of Ephesus.

And secondly, there was a danger that the temple of Artemis, whom all Asia and the world worshipped, as verse 27 tells us, might be regarded as worthless.

Now this is similar, I was thinking about this, this is similar to the opposition Christians involved in the anti-gambling task force have come up against from Crown Casino and the gambling industry in general, as they have made a stand against gambling practices in Victoria.

You get these sorts of opposition that comes our way. Paul was receiving opposition because there was this economic crisis.

Business was falling off for these silversmiths of Ephesus. Well in verses 28 to 34 we discover the enemy's tactics. When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

[11 : 56] The city was filled with the confusion and the people rushed together to the theatre, the theatre that we saw on that overhead. Filled with confusion, people rushed together to the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.

Paul wished to go into the crowd but the disciples wouldn't let him. Even some officials of the province, Paul had friends up high, even some of the officials of the province of Asia who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theatre.

Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion and most of them didn't know why they had come together. Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander whom the Jews had pushed forward and Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defence before the people.

But when they recognised that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

By now, this Demetrius had gotten through to the union that both their religion and their business were being devastated by Paul and his teaching.

[13 : 12] Enraged by this, they came up with the tactic of getting the crowd to rally around the cry, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! they would say. And the mob then set out to find Paul and his disciples.

Failing to find Paul, they settled instead for Gaius and Aristarchus whom they dragged into the local theatre. Now when Paul became aware of this, he wanted to go too and address them.

But his friends, these friends in the high places as well urged him not to go. And by now, this mob was so confused that the majority of them didn't know why they had come there in the first place.

Some concluded that it was this guy Alexander's fault. And as he was about to make a defence recognising that he was a Jew, the mob began to cry again, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

There's mass confusion going on. And this, Demetrius has whipped this crowd up into a frenzy. Now his motive is selfish ambition, I think, but he's brought forward the crowd to whip them up into a frenzy to talk about how great this Artemis of the Ephesians is.

[14 : 31] But the majority of these people that are there don't even know what's going on. And as, in James chapter 3, it reminds us of these bitter words or these words that are said.

James chapter 3 verses 14 and 16. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

Selfish ambition seems to be reigning here. And disorder and chaos is also one of the things which is coming out of this particular crowd. Well, there's the enemy's tactics.

In verses 35 through to the end of the chapter, we learn of the enemy's defeat. When the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven?

[15 : 53] Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess.

If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open. That's the place to go and do all this sort of stuff. And there are proconsuls.

Let them bring charges there against one another. If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.

When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. Having been held by Satan and demonic worship, greed and fear, the Ephesians were now being carried away by a senseless mob who were drowning in this confusion and in hatred, rage and murderous intent.

They were inflamed after two hours of screaming and shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! As though that would bring back the lost trade for the silversmiths.

[17 : 09] But Satan had overstepped his boundaries. A town clerk who had reasoned with them, with the crowd and appealed to the political reality was able to send this mob home.

In essence, the message is that we are the guardians of the temple Artemis. So let's keep calm. Gaius and Aristarchus, they're not robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

Demetrius and the trade unionists are free to appeal to the courts to redress their problem if they want. Our immediate problem now is that we're in danger of being accused of starting a riot.

this case is dismissed. If we don't calm down, Rome will step in and then all hell will break loose. He calmed the mob down.

He sent them home. He dismissed it. Well, I want to examine some of the spiritual principles that are found here.

[18 : 13] As Christians, we are in a spiritual battle in which we face many adversaries. But as Christians, we know that we must look at life on two levels, the physical and the spiritual.

Christians are not to fight the physical battles on a physical level like the world does, but rather on a spiritual level and with spiritual weapons.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. Now, in the immediate context of Ephesus, Satan's strongholds were a number of things.

They were the proud, the hard hearts of the Jewish leaders, the occult, if you like, black arts and idolatry. And yet, the risen Lord through the love of the apostle Paul for the Lord and the word of truth, that is the gospel message, the gospel of salvation, over a period of three years, penetrated this very kingdom of Satan and delivered many captives over to the kingdom of God.

Many hearts were won for the Lord. As Christians, we need to heed the Lord in this day. For if we would by faith gird our loins with truth, we could in time see the defeat of the lies of Satan in the strongholds of things which affect our world today.

[19 : 54] Things like drugs, like sexual confusion, immorality, and the abortion and pornography industries. Behind all these social problems are real people who are victims of the evil one, of Satan, just like you and I were once his victims.

by being available to our Lord and by faith being willing to teach the truth of the word of God about all of life, many of Satan's victims can be delivered from this deadly kingdom.

in this world of darkness, there will never ever be total eradication of the problems that we face daily. But it doesn't mean that we can't make a difference.

The apostle, Paul, through faithful obedience to God in the teaching and the proclamation of the word, made a huge difference throughout the whole region of Asia, if you read the passage.

Now there was lots of opposition to his message due to the selfish reasons as I've tried to point out earlier on. But hearts were also softened and people turned to Christ as the power of the truth of God was proclaimed.

[21 : 22] Now as Christians we are sometimes a lone voice in the places where God's spirit sends us. That may be at home, could be at school, could be in our workplace, in our travel, whether it's in the bushwalking or tennis clubs or whatever social clubs that we might belong to.

We can be a lone voice in those places. But God can always in any age soften the hearts of people who are so steeped up in sinful ways through our faithful witness and proclamation of the truths of the gospel just as Paul did in Ephesus.

Now not all people who the gospel is proclaimed to will turn to Christ. But there will be many that do if we are willing to step out in faith.

And we have to be willing to persevere and continue on living out and sharing our faith. In other words I'm saying we have to be active in evangelism.

That's what the apostle Paul did in his ministry. He was active in evangelism. Let me read to you a final paragraph.

[22 : 43] When we contrast much contemporary evangelism with Paul's its shallowness is immediately shown up.

Our evangelism tends to be too ecclesiastical that is inviting people to church whereas Paul also took the gospel out into the secular world.

Our evangelism tends to be too emotional that is appeals for decision without an adequate basis of understanding whereas Paul taught reasoned and tried to persuade.

Our evangelism can be too superficial making brief encounters and expecting quick results. That's my problem.

Whereas Paul he stayed in Corinth and Ephesus for five years faithfully sowing gospel seed and in due time reaping a harvest.

[23 : 50] Many people heard the gospel in Ephesus as we've seen in the past couple of weeks. Many people responded to the gospel. There was opposition to the gospel as a result but the word of the Lord prevailed.

I want us to spend a few moments in quiet thinking about ways in which we can proclaim the gospel the people that we know around us who need to hear the gospel and think of ways in which perhaps we haven't been faithful in the proclamation and then I'll just finish with a prayer.

So let's just pray. Our Lord your gospel is truth. It is the gospel which brings salvation and Father there are so many people in this world who live in spiritual darkness.

Lord we pray that as Christians who have your Holy Spirit that we would be willing to step out in faith to make a proclamation of the gospel, the truths of the gospel.

We pray Lord that when hard times come our way that we would be willing to persevere in obedience and faithfulness to you. For those friends of ours around us who don't know you give us courage and strength to reach out to them.

[25 : 10] We thank you for the way in which your scriptures teach us through the life of Paul's ministry, through the extraordinary ministry he had.

And Lord I pray that it would be an encouragement to us to want to serve you more faithfully. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen.

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