Text: Acts 19:21-41
Title: The gospel stirs up sinners in Ephesus.
Truth: The way of Christ is controversial, but we continue serving the Lord.
Date/Location: Wednesdays December 4 & 11, 2013 at FBC

Introduction

The magicians already suffered a loss in business and reputation when as much as $1 million of their books were destroyed by new converts to Christianity.

Now, a major economic disaster is on the horizon for the idolaters who are going to lose revenue because fewer people will want to buy their statues which they took to be representative of their gods.

I. Paul's Further Travel, v. 21-22

A. We are still reading about Paul's third missionary journey. He has spent significant time in Ephesus, after which he planned to travel north and west to Macedonia (Thessalonica) and Achaia (Athens and Corinth). During this trip he would collect offerings for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27, 1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8:1-3, 9:1-2).

B. From Greece, he headed back to Jerusalem to deliver the offering and fellowship with the churches there and in Antioch.

C. His ministry focus after accomplishing those things was to go to Rome. Read more about this in Romans 15:22-24, 28. That would be a launching pad for him to go to Spain and evangelize the western part of the Roman empire. The entire focus of Acts for the last 8 chapters is pointed toward Rome. Paul did get there, but not in the way he was initially thinking.

D. Before doing all that, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia to minister and gather the aforementioned offering.

E. Why would Paul leave Ephesus at this time? There was magnificent work being done there. "All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (19:10). Also, "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (19:20). He left at a time of spiritual strength in the region, which is far better than leaving the place when it is in a state of spiritual weakness. There were undoubtedly people there who he had trained and could carry on a fruitful ministry.

The text tells us something more: "Paul purposed in the Spirit." Paul was moved by God's Spirit to do what he was doing. He was not random.

II. The Way, v. 23

A. A common use of the word is for a way, road, or highway, like "the way to go to Detroit is by I-94." As a result, another use of the word is about someone being "on their way" in the act of traveling. Metaphorically, it is used to speak of the "way of life" of someone, which is the course of behavior that the person follows.

B. Various Ways.

The broad way of destruction – Matthew 7:13

The narrow way of life – Matthew 7:14

The way of life and death – Jeremiah 21:8

The way of peace – Luke 1:79, Rom. 3:17, Isaiah 59:8

The ways of life – Acts 2:28

The way of salvation – Acts 16:17

The way of righteousness – Matt. 21:32, 2 Peter 2:21

The way, the truth, and the life – John 14:6

The error of his way – James 5:20

The way of truth – 2 Peter 2:2

The way of Cain – Jude 11

The right way - 2 Peter 2:15

Their own way – Acts 14:16, see also Isaiah 53:6

Unstable ways – James 1:8

Paul's ways in Christ – 1 Cor. 4:17

A more excellent way – 1 Cor. 12:31

The ways of God are past finding out – Romans 11:33

Righteous and true ways – Revelation 15:3

The ways of God – Hebrews 3:10, Psalm 51:13, Matthew 22:16, Mark 12:14, Luke 20:21

God's ways versus our ways – Isaiah 55:8-9

The straight ways of the Lord – Acts 13:10

The way that God commanded – Exodus 32:8, Deut. 5:33

The Christian Way – Acts 9:2, 18:25, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14 which includes what is written in the Law and Prophets, 24:22

C. We preach the way of God, the way of life, the way of righteousness, what we call Biblical Christianity. I trust you are living in *that way*.

III. A Disturbance Instigated, v. 23-27

A. Demetrius instigated a major, city-wide riot. He was a silversmith, and probably a leading man in their trade (president of the guild or union president). There were several motivating factors that drove him to plan the uprising.

1. He had an economic interest, indicated in v. 24-25 with the words "no small profit." His business generated a lot of revenue for the craftsmen. This was "no small disturbance" (literal translation) over "no small profit." Follow the money! The tradesmen were going to lose revenue and work if people abandoned idolatry like was recently happening.

2. He also had a religious interest, as indicated in v. 26-27. His beef with Paul is that Paul is teaching that there is only one true God and that gods cannot be made with hands and worshipped as if they are real. But their temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, so it was important in that community.

3. He had a reputational interest indicated in v. 27 when he said, "this trade of ours [is] in danger of falling into disrepute." Also, the reputation of their false god and their city and temple was in danger.

B. Often, people have multiple and overlapping motivations for the things that they do. These motivations may not be well understood by others or even by themselves, particularly without careful thought. But the motivations are there.

1. In this case, Demetrius' three motivations all pointed in the same direction: he felt compelled to do something to save his job and reputation and religious interest.

2. The believer is not motivated like this. If he must give up his job because of ungodliness in it, he will not hang onto it just for the money but will find something else to do. He certainly would not care about maintaining a good reputation for a false god, and he would not at all care about his reputation or that of his (sinful) trade. His love for God would overcome all that.

C. We have here the situation that Paul, the Christian, is debunking the imaginary polytheistic beliefs of a whole community that believes in the goddess Diana (goddess of the hunt, moon, the underworld, and fertility, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diana_(mythology)).

D. Today it is in vogue to mock the "imaginary" beliefs of Christians in a God they cannot see who supposedly created everything, written about in a Bible that contains all kinds of evil. This mocking is done by those who imagine spontaneous generation occurred in a primordial pea soup of unknown origin that created such complex and varied living systems now in a life and death struggle for survival in a world full of natural and man-made evil. It seems like *they* believe in something you cannot see which resulted in a world full of evil. I will take the Christian Theistic explanation any day! (See my December 10, 2013 blog post for more on this.)

IV. The Disturbance Itself, v. 28-34

A. The response of the city's inhabitants indicated that they were in agreement with the thinking of Demetrius. They gathered in the theater as one man, but there was mass confusion in the city, as we would expect in such a mob action.

B. Paul was not immediately accessible, so the mob took two Macedonian Christians, Gaius (there was a Gaius from Derbe in Galatia, Acts 20:4, but this is a different man from Macedonia) and Aristarchus (Thessalonica, Acts 20:4, 27:2). The mob dragged them in among the crowd. Paul's Christian friends in Ephesus would not allow him to go in. They were wise, I think. Not much spiritual good is going to happen amid a scene like that. People need to be of calmer mind to think properly about spiritual things. In this situation, there is a real "animal spirit" at work among the people, a demonic influence.

C. Mass confusion. Most of the people did not know why they were there. Here is a suggestion: if you don't know why you are in a place or what you are doing there or why you are doing what you are doing, it would be wise to leave, go home, and get your head screwed on straight!

D. Poor Alexander was put forward by the Jews. We do not know if Alexander was a Christian Jew or just a Jew, but either way did not matter to the mob because the ones who understood what was going on were opposed to any kind of monotheistic religion.

E. Mass hysteria. Two hours the crowd chanted "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." This is a signal that there is something really wrong in these people's heads. Any kind of vainly repetitive statements in prayer or song worship are to be avoided. Pagans act the way that the Ephesians did, and believers must not act like pagans.

V. The Disturbance Concluded, 35-41

A. The clerk is a leader of the city. He tried to convince the assembled people that the reputation of their city and their goddess would not be greatly tarnished by the Christians because the whole world knew about Ephesus and her residents being guardians of Diana (Artemis). He said that the Christians were not guilty of criminal acts.

B. He encouraged them to use the lawful means of making charges and having a court hearing, if say the Christians were causing actual monetary loss. They must have a lawful assembly, and not a mob because they would be unable to give a good accounting of what they were doing to the higher authorities who could do them real harm. There was no reason to get so upset about the matter.

C. He dismissed them. This guy exercised leadership!

Conclusion

Christianity inevitably upsets the world for a whole host of reasons. What did Paul do? He continued believing and continued ministering anyway. That is a lesson we can learn as well. All the crying and carrying on in paganism and political circles is just so much noise. What matters is that the news of Christ be proclaimed everywhere, that we make disciples, give them God's word, train them, and pass on a strong church to the next generation as long as the Lord delays His return.

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