Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 19:23-41
Lesson 36 – Something's Got to Give

Acts 19:23-41 (NIV) 23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.
24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. 25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow 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. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." 28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.
32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. 33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"
35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?
36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.
38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it."
41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

Discussion Questions

Part 1: What You Refuse to Release Reveals What Rules You

1. What was Demetrius really afraid of losing, and how did his financial interests influence his opposition to Paul's ministry? Scripture: Acts 19:23–27
    a. How can our personal interests sometimes prevent us from recognizing what God is doing?
2. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." What does our use of money reveal about the condition of our hearts? Scripture: Matthew 6:19–21
    a. If someone examined your financial priorities, what would they conclude matters most to you?
3. Jesus teaches that we cannot serve both God and money. What is the difference between having money and being controlled by money? Scripture: Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:9–10
    a. What are some warning signs that financial security has become more important than trusting God?
4. Why is it sometimes easier to acknowledge God's authority over our spiritual lives than to surrender our financial decisions to Him? Scripture: Luke 12:15; Proverbs 3:5–9
    a. What area of your life would be most difficult to surrender if God challenged it today?

Part 2: You Can't Hold On to Your Comfort and Fully Surrender to Christ

5. Demetrius initially expressed concern about his income but later emphasized protecting the honor of Artemis. How can people use respectable or even religious arguments to justify selfish motives? Scripture: Acts 19:25–27; Jeremiah 17:9–10
    a. How can we distinguish between genuine financial responsibility and making excuses to avoid generosity?
6. Psalm 24 declares that everything belongs to the Lord. How should understanding ourselves as stewards rather than owners change the way we manage our resources? Scripture: Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 4:2
    a. Follow-up: What would change in your financial decisions if you consistently approached every dollar as something God entrusted to you?
7. What does the New Testament teach about the attitude, willingness, and generosity that should characterize Christian giving? Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6–8; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2
    a. How can tithing serve as a meaningful discipline of stewardship without reducing generosity to a legalistic obligation?
8. Jesus teaches that following Him requires self-denial. How can our attachment to comfort and lifestyle interfere with our willingness to obey God? Scripture: Luke 9:23–25; Philippians 3:7–8
    a. What is one comfort, habit, or unnecessary expense you could surrender to make more room for God's purposes?

Part 3: When Jesus Changes Your Heart, Your Priorities Have to Change

9. Why were the new believers in Ephesus willing to destroy valuable scrolls rather than continue practicing their former ways of life? Scripture: Acts 19:18–20
    a. Follow-up: What does their willingness to accept financial loss teach us about the difference between simply believing in Jesus and allowing Jesus to transform our lives?
10. Compare the response of the Ephesian believers with the response of Demetrius. What do these two groups reveal about the competing influences of faith and financial self-interest? Scripture: Acts 19:18–27
    a. Follow-up: When following Jesus becomes costly, what determines whether a person chooses obedience or personal convenience?
11. Paul teaches that Jesus, though rich, became poor for our sake. How should Christ's sacrificial generosity influence our attitude toward giving and serving others? Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5–8
    a. How does giving out of gratitude for God's grace differ from giving out of guilt, pressure, or the expectation of receiving something in return?
12. Jesus warned that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. How can we pursue financial stability while ensuring that money never becomes the source of our identity, security, or happiness? Scripture: Luke 12:15–21; Matthew 6:31–33
    a. What practical evidence should appear in our lives when Jesus truly has authority over our priorities?

Takeaway Challenge for the Week

Challenge 1: Conduct a Personal Stewardship Audit
Scripture: Matthew 6:21; Psalm 24:1

This week, prayerfully review how you use the resources God has entrusted to you. Examine your spending, saving, debt obligations, generosity, and financial priorities. Ask yourself: "Does the way I manage my money reflect the Lordship of Jesus Christ?"

Action: Identify one specific financial adjustment you can responsibly make to better align your resources with your faith. For some, that may mean beginning a consistent giving commitment. For others, it may mean reducing unnecessary spending, in order to be more aligned with how God wants you to sacrificially give to the ministry.

Closing Thought:

God is not simply interested in getting something out of our hands. He is interested in getting complete authority over our hearts. Because when Jesus truly has your heart, your priorities will eventually reflect His Lordship. And when our comfort, possessions, or personal desires compete with our commitment to Christ — SOMETHING'S GOT TO GIVE!

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

1. (19:21-23) **Evangelism— Strategy**: Paul's great strategy for world-evangelization can be seen here. Paul had launched his mission in the great cities of South GALATIA (Acts 13:1-14:28). Then he had the desire to quickly reach Ephesus, the link between the East and West. But God, knowing the generations that lay ahead, led Paul over into Europe (Acts 15:36-18:22, esp. Acts 16:6f). After Europe, Paul struck out for Ephesus, "the gate between the continents" (Acts 18:23-19:41). With the evangelization of Ephesus he said, "I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). This was a critical statement, for Paul was saying that the great cities lying along the great road to Rome were now evangelized. Rome, the capital of the world, could now be reached. His prayer for years had been the conquest of Rome, and now his heart seemed to tell him that his prayer could be fulfilled (Romans 1:13-15). Observe that Paul ached to evangelize Spain as well (Romans 15:24).

Now note a significant point: Paul's purpose was to evangelize, but he did not forget to minister to churches and to send forth disciples. The scene was this: Paul was in Ephesus (Asia or Turkey). He ached to reach Rome for Christ, but the churches at Jerusalem and throughout Judea were suffering famine. He sensed a deep need to help them, so before striking out for Rome, he planned to visit Jerusalem with an offering from all the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (the European or Greek churches). Paul was not able to leave immediately, so he sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to the European churches. They were to exhort the churches and raise the funds necessary for the relief offerings. He planned to follow as soon as possible.

Thought 1. The call of the minister is to evangelize and to edify churches and to send forth disciples. All these ministries are necessary and all must be done. We should never forget the dynamic example of Paul.

2. (19:24-26) **Greed— Materialism**: The Way of the Lord disturbed the greedy and the materialists and those who were working in evil professions. There are two primary reasons:

1. The message of the Lord attacked the greed of evil professions. Demetrius and the silversmiths were engaged in an evil profession, that of making and selling items (idols) that were harmful and damaging to men. Note: their craft was profitable, very profitable. It was their livelihood, the basis of their wealth and social standing. Demetrius was apparently an influential citizen in the city, perhaps the head of the silversmith guild.

2. The Lord changed men's lives: He demanded they face the truth and deny all false gods and commit their lives to God alone. So many citizens and apparently tourists were being converted to Christ that they were no longer buying the idols, and it was cutting into the profits of Demetrius and the other tradesmen.

Note: when a man is truly converted, he does two things.

a. He faces the truth. There are "no gods which are made with hands" (Acts 19:26) or created by the imaginations of men. If man imagines it or makes it, it is an idle, empty thought or else just material substance. It is not God, not the Sovereign Majesty of the universe...

• who has life within Himself. • who is Creator of all. • who sustains and rules over all. • who is the Savior of men.

"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4).

"[There is] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephes. 4:6).

b. He denies all gods except God Himself. He repents and is converted: he "turns to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thes. 1:9). (See note—Acts 17:23; note—Acts 17:24-25 for discussion.)

Thought 1. There are too many Demetriuses in the world; too many greedy men who engage in evil professions—professions that harm and degrade men. The great need of the hour is for some to step forth as the *Pauls* of the world, step forth proclaiming that men must turn to God from the idols and evil professions of this world.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

3. (19:27-29) **Persecution— Society— Nations**: The Way of the Lord was falsely accused and attacked. Demetrius charged Paul and the Christians with being revolutionaries who were...

- destroying the livelihood and small businesses of all silversmiths in Ephesus.
- destroying one of the leading businesses of the city (the temple of Diana).
- destroying the tourist trade from Asia and the world.

The parallel with evil businesses of every generation is clearly seen in the charges made against Christianity. The business may involve such evils as drugs, alcohol, pornography, or gambling. But whatever the business, jobs and livelihoods are at stake; and when they are, emotions are easily aroused.

Demetrius stirred the silversmiths to move about and to incite the city against Paul and the believers. They were able to catch two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and drag them into the theatre. Note that the mob was "full of wrath," in a wild rage.

Thought 1. Christianity does preach revolution, but not world revolution. It preaches spiritual revolution.

⇒ Christianity does not preach physical violence, but spiritual violence.
⇒ Christianity does not tell men to take up weapons of physical warfare, but weapons of spiritual warfare.
⇒ Christianity does not teach destruction and death; it teaches spiritual conversion and life.
⇒ Christianity does not destroy; it builds.
⇒ Christianity does not force; it preaches freedom.

Therefore, the charge was false. The Ephesians had no need to fear. The temple, as idolatrous as it was, would not be destroyed by the Christian believers; neither would citizens be coerced to follow The Way. The choice was each man's. No force whatsoever was involved. All Paul and the believers wanted was the right of free speech, the right to proclaim...

• that *God is*. • that *God is love*. • that *God has revealed His love in His Son Jesus Christ*.

• that *God now invites men to love His Son Jesus Christ and to love each other, putting away every evil thing that hurts self and others*.

Note a clear fact: The Way of Christ and of God is the best way for every society. Righteousness, love, and justice always help and build society; they never tear down and destroy. Naturally there may be some shock for a society to go through as it rids itself of evil professions and replaces them with good and healthy professions. But think of the glorious results—the lives saved, the maimed bodies prevented, the crumbling families united, the enslaved bodies delivered, and on and on. Think of the health and strength of a society with no evil professions and little greed, a society with neighbors living for the welfare and love of each other.

"By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 11:11).

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

"It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness" (Proverbs 16:12).

4. (19:30-31) **Courage— Wisdom**: The Way of the Lord required great courage, but also wisdom. Paul and the other believers had naturally heard the uproar. "The whole city was filled with confusion," caught up in the riot. When Paul discovered that his two dear disciples, Gaius and Aristarchus, had been dragged into the arena...

• note his courage: he rushed in and tried to save them.

• note that some of the local officials restrained Paul. These officials were "Asiarchs." The word means the local representatives elected by a district to manage and oversee the public games and festivals of great cities. We do not know if the officials were believers, but they were at least friends of Paul.

Thought 1. We all need the courage to rush to the aid of God's people when they are being ridiculed, abused, and persecuted for their faith. Too often, when a fellow believer is under attack, we sit quietly, fearing lest we are also turned against. The scene may be at work, school, neighborhood, or a host of other places; but no matter where, we must take a stand by the side of those being abused for Christ.

"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God" (Phil. 1:28).

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

However, there are times when wisdom tells us to refrain from action. We are to be as Paul, willing to risk our lives for others, but not to foolishly endanger our lives.

"Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly" (Acts 19:36).

5. (19:32-34) **Persecution**: The Way of the Lord was the object of mob action. What happened next is interesting. Paul and Aristarchus were both Jews, so the Jews began to fear the mob might connect them with Paul and turn against them. The Jews convinced one of their own, Alexander, to stand before the crowd and speak against Paul and the Christians. But when he arose and lifted his hand to quiet them, the mob went into a frenzy, crying out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Note how long the cry went on—for two whole hours.

Thought 1. Note three points.

1) Note how some forsake the truth when worldly pressure is applied. The Jews were against the evil profession (idolatry) as much as anyone could possibly be, but they feared retaliation, so they backed off and refused to support the believers.

2) Note how easily led and aroused the general public is by misleading and twisted information. Note what Scripture says:

"Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the [majority] knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32).

3) Evil professions and men of greed will always work to incite the public against genuine believers. They will often use misleading and twisted information. It is the only way they can survive and continue to fill their pockets with their evil trade.

"But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues" (Matthew 10:17).

"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

6. (19:35-41) **God, Presence— Deliverance**: The Way of the Lord was miraculously protected by God. How God overruled is clearly seen in the verses above.

Thought 1. In facing persecution, if it is God's will for us to be delivered He can and will use men of the world to bring reason to the persecutors and to violence. God overrules the spirits of men. We must always remember this when we find ourselves in the midst of trouble.

"[God] stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people" (Psalm 65:7).