**STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS**

The Journeys of Paul

Week 8: Week of March 8, 2020

Sermon Title: *Disrupting the Status Quo in Ephesus*

Text: Acts 19:23-41

**(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)**

**Background**

* Luke begins by telling a story of Apollos (18:24-28). As Priscilla and Aquila brought the imperfect instruction of Apollos into the fullness of the Pauline gospel, so Paul himself brings the imperfect discipleship of the group into the fullness of the Spirit (19:1-7).
* The pattern of synagogue preaching, opposition from within the synagogue, a schism within the synagogue, and a steady growth of mission still attracting Jews as well as Greeks, is repeated.
* More important was the contrast with religious practices and magic, where the word of God achieved a signal triumph (19:11-20).
* ﻿It is significant that Luke uses the name “the Way” when he describes the confrontation of the Christians with the vested interests of the silversmiths. Christianity is a way of life. Following Christ, the Way, frees us of dependence on false, diminutive gods of our culture and provides us with an ethical resoluteness that disturbs practices that contradict the kingdom of God.
* ﻿Believing in Christ and being filled with His Spirit made silver shrines of Artemis totally unnecessary. These images of Artemis were carefully crafted by the silversmiths and sold at great profit.
* Each May there was a great gathering of people from all over Asia Minor. They came to Ephesus for a month-long religious celebration in honor of Artemis. ﻿ Paul had flatly told people of the impotence of the false god and any image that represented it.
* ﻿Remember his preaching against false gods also would have threatened emperor worship. The weight of the evidence is that these officials had either been won to Christ or were sympathetic. The Lord had prepared them to step in to warn Paul at just the right moment.
* Who was Alexander and why would the Jews want to make him the target of the silversmith’s rage? That Luke knew his name may indicate ﻿that he was a Jewish convert to Christianity. Perhaps the Jews wanted to punish him for his defection and thereby keep the blame on the Christians rather than on the Jewish community, which also stubbornly held to monotheism and was equally opposed to the worship of Artemis.
* When Alexander was recognized as a Jew, the crowd would not listen to him. Instead the silversmiths began chanting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” which they prolonged for two hours.
* The town clerk was the Lord’s agent to quiet the crowd. This man, who would have ﻿been the Roman proconsul of Asia Minor, ruled that the mob had no power to try the Christians. If Demetrius and the silversmiths had a legitimate charge, they should follow the due process established by Rome. With that the proconsul dismissed the assembly. He had performed the same function for the Christians at Ephesus that Gallio had performed for Paul in Corinth.

Luke’s Primary Interests:

* Establishing Christian identity – the Way.
* The contrast with misconceptions and corruptions of the message of Jesus and the public triumph of Christianity over magic and one of the greatest religious cults of the day (19:13-17, 23-27);
* The reaffirmation that Gentile perception and portrayal of God is false (19:26)
* The protection given to the new sect by important authorities against the hostility of the mob (19:31, 35-41)
* The significance of Paul in Ephesus cannot be exaggerated (2 years at least). Col 1:5-8 and 4:12-13 show how the Lycus valley mission came about. From there Paul wrote some of his various Corinthian Epistles. There is also a tradition linking the apostle John in his later years to Ephesus.

**Discussion Questions**

**Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).**

1. *Describe someone you have observed as a person of “power” or “influence” (physically, economically, spiritually, etc.) What makes them “powerful”?*
2. *Have you ever been falsely accused of something for which you were clearly not at fault? What was that like for you? Or, the opposite – Have you ever falsely accused someone for something for which they were not guilty?*
3. *What difference would it make if the Holy Spirit was not in your life? How would you be different today? Why?*

**For reflection (not in any order – again, pick the ones you feel might be best for the group. Do not feel like you have to get through all the questions☺)**

1. *What was the cause of the riot about the Way and how was it expressed to the public?*
2. *Who has power in this story and what kind of power do they have? How do they use it?*
3. *Why do the silversmiths see Paul and his message as a threat?*
4. *In your opinion, does the gospel of Christ present to be a threat today? Why or why not?*
5. *Why do you think their sharing of the gospel had such a profound impact?*
6. *How did the mob behave and whom did they threaten?*
7. *If you were there, what would you have seen or felt? Have you ever been caught up in a “mob” or “group” mentality? What is that like?*
8. *How did the city officials handle the situation? How is the town clerk used by God? What wisdom does he show?*
9. *When have you seen God at work with those who have no idea that they are part of something so much bigger?*
10. *The coming together of the economic, religious, political and cultural impact of the gospel is one of the major issues Christians face today. Where have you been challenged or had to come face-to-face with having to change your ways? In other words, how has the gospel “disrupted your own status quo”? Where has your faith “disrupted the status quo” with the people around you?*
11. *The disciples showed remarkable consistency between being faithful to the gospel and at the same time being so innocent that there was nothing to accuse them of. When have you seen the gospel proclaimed without this balance? What is the result?*
12. *What accommodations to distortions of the gospel have you experienced? What kinds of behaviors might we engage in to proclaim the gospel in our midst?*