

“Opposition at Ephesus”
(Acts 19:21-41)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. A mighty revival was taking place at Ephesus:
 - a. All of Asia heard the Word as Paul ministered at the school of Tyrannus.
 - b. God was performing miracles: even using handkerchiefs and aprons associated with Paul to heal the sick, cast out demons, all to draw attention to His messenger bringing His Word.
 - c. The seven sons of Sceva in their attempt and failure to exorcise a demon out of a man and their subsequent beating at his hands, drew even more attention to the validity of Paul’s ministry so that many confessed and repented of their evil practices, brought their magic books and burned them publicly.
 - d. The Lord was saving many, and the genuineness of their conversion was obvious to all – through their repentance.

2. It’s a powerful thing when the Lord sends true revival.
 - a. We often hear about revivals today – people getting healed, laughing or barking in the “Spirit,” generating “interest” in the name of Jesus.
 - b. But the fruit of these so-called revivals boil down to selfishness, lust, greed.
 - c. A true revival is marked by a turning from worldliness to the things of the Lord: a genuine concern for their state of their souls and a desire to be holy because holiness is what they desire.
 - d. This is what we see here, and this is what we should be praying for today.

B. Preview.

1. But as we pray, we need to bear in mind that there is a price to pay.
 - a. Revival is costly.
 - (i) Not in terms of money, but in terms of attacks from the enemy.
 - (ii) He’s not going to stand idly by while his kingdom is spoiled.
 - (iii) This is why we noted last time that if we’re going to engage in spiritual warfare, we need to be equipped, we need to be prepared.

 - b. This morning, we see the rise of Satan’s opposition against the Gospel.
 - (i) A certain man named Demetrius saw that his favorite goddess was taking a beating from Paul’s ministry, and so was his business.
 - (ii) So he stirred up those of his trade, with the result that the whole city was in an uproar.
 - (iii) They tried to seize Paul, but not being able to get to him, they took his companions into a public arena, seeking to put an end to this problem once and for all.

 - c. But we also see the Lord’s protection through one of His most ordinary means: the magistrate.
 - (i) The town clerk settled the mob down.

(ii) The result was that the crowd backed down and nothing came of it.

2. This gives us our two points this morning:
 - a. First, when the kingdom of heaven advances, the kingdom of the evil one will rise to stand against it.
 - b. But second, when the kingdom of the evil one rises against God's kingdom, God rises to defend His people.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, when the kingdom of heaven advances, the kingdom of the evil one will rise to stand against it.
 1. When the work the Lord was doing in Ephesus began to taper off, Paul began to feel the compulsion to go to Jerusalem (v. 21).
 - a. That's where he set his sights.
 - (i) Much like Jesus, who towards the end of His ministry, set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem to lay down his life.
 - (ii) The Spirit was now preparing Paul for this journey where he would be arrested and placed on trial, that he might bear witness to the Gospel before many kings, and finally be taken to Rome, where many in Caesar's own household would be converted.
 - b. But before he began this trip, he wanted to return through the regions of Macedonia and Achaia, where he had planted churches on his second journey, to visit and strengthen them.
 - c. To prepare for his visit, he sent two of his traveling companions, Timothy and Erastus ahead of him, while he stayed in Ephesus (v. 22).
 2. It was now the enemy chose to attack: "About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way" (v. 23).
 - a. Satan began this attack through one of his own: a worshipper of Artemis.
 - (i) He was no more than an ordinary tradesmen who appeared to have been a "sincere" and devout worshipper.
 - (ii) We should note two regarding those who hold something false sincerely:
 - (a) First, if anything, it makes them more dangerous than less, since it strengthens their resolve to fight for their cause.
 - (b) Second, it won't excuse anyone on the Day of Judgment: sincerity doesn't matter, truth does.
 - (c) We often excuse those who believe other religions on the grounds of their sincerity, when in reality it works against both them and us.
 - (d) Something sincerely held is harder to overcome than something nominally held.
 - b. Now the name of this worshipper was Demetrius (v. 24).
 - (i) He was a silversmith, a man who made silver shrines of Artemis.
 - (a) Artemis was also called Diana by the Romans – she was the goddess of forests and hills, whose temple at Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

- (b) The shrines he made were probably small copies of that temple with a statue of Artemis inside.
 - (c) Devotees would purchase them, take them home and worship them.
- (ii) Demetrius was angry because Paul, through the Gospel, was taking away his business.
- (a) It doesn't appear that Paul directly attacked Artemis – that doesn't appear to be his method – but by preaching the truth, it had the same effect.
 - (1) Paul preached that gods made with hands are no gods at all – and he was right: they are merely the work of man's hands.
 - (2) He was *persuading* and turning a large number of people away from the “faith” of Artemis to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see the power of argument when used savingly by the Spirit.
 - (3) The silversmith's trade was in danger of falling into disrepute: what good are silver shrines if they're promoting a false god?
 - (4) The possibility existed of his losing his comfortable living: who wants to be reduced to poverty?
 - (5) And the temple of Artemis might be abandoned and she dethroned from her magnificence.
 - (b) Notice that Satan used two very powerful motives to get Demetrius to persecute Paul:
 - (1) His basic belief system was under attack.
 - (2) His wealth was in jeopardy (v. 25).
 - (3) Satan knows which buttons to push, and superstition and wealth are two of the most powerful.
- c. Demetrius thought the other silversmiths should be concerned about this as well and so he stirred them up (vv. 25-28).
- (i) There is strength in numbers.
 - (ii) The more you can rally to your cause, the more damage you can inflict.
 - (iii) When he was done, they “were filled with rage, [and] *began* crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ (v. 28).
- d. Satan was so successful through the efforts of Demetrius that the whole city was thrown into confusion and became a mob (v. 29).
- (i) When they couldn't find Paul, they took his traveling companions – Gaius (from Derbe) and Aristarchus (of Thessalonica) – and rushed into the theater (an amphitheater for public gatherings, seating somewhere between 24,000 – 56,000 people).
 - (ii) Paul wanted to go in after them to address the assembly, but neither the disciples nor some of the Asiarchs – ten men elected by the cities of Asia as officials (whether Christians or not we don't know, but some being friends of Paul) – wouldn't let him (vv. 30-31).
- e. It was a good thing, because the assembly was a mob: “So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together” (v. 32).

- (i) When the Jews put Alexander forward to speak, the crowd thought he was the reason for the commotion.
- (ii) Knowing that Jews were opposed to the worship of Artemis, when it appeared that he wanted to address the crowd, they stopped him by shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” for two hours (vv. 33-34).
- (iii) Alexander was most likely not a Christian, but a Jew who sought to defend the rest of the Jews against any guilt by association, to assure the mob that they were just as much against Paul as they were.
 - (a) Some believe this is the same Alexander Paul speaks of in 2 Tim. 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.”
 - (b) He may have even professed faith in Christ at one time, only to be excommunicated later for his attacks against Paul, “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:18-20).
- (iv) But again, we see the hatred this false religion generated against Christ and His people.
- (v) Satan uses all false religion to attack God’s people, particularly when God powerfully moves His cause forward in revival.

B. But second, we see that when the kingdom of the evil one rises to stand against God’s people, God comes to their defense.

1. He did this through the local authority:
 - a. The town clerk sought to talk some sense into the mob (v. 35).
 - b. He was not merely a secretary, but the chief magistrate of the city.
 - c. He had charge of the city’s money, control of public assemblies and communicated directly with the proconsul (Robertson).
2. What did this man do?
 - a. He offered words of “wisdom” to calm the crowd, much like Gamaliel when the apostles were on trial:
 - (i) First, he reminded them that their religion was based on well-established “fact”:
 - (a) “After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, ‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the *image* which fell down from heaven? So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash’ (v. 35-36).
 - (b) Since in their minds there was no question that these things were true, they didn’t need to feel threatened.
 - (c) The Lord can use even the lies of the enemy to protect His people.
 - (ii) Second, he pointed out that these men had done nothing illegal or blasphemous:

- (a) “For you have brought these men *here* who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess” (v. 37).
 - (b) They had not stolen anything, or attacked their religion directly.
 - (c) Consider Paul in Athens, at Mars Hill: he simply promoted the truth rather than directly attacking their religion (Acts 18:22-31).
 - (d) Perhaps this is a more effective method.
- (iii) Third, he pointed to the right way of handling the situation:
- (a) They should take it to the courts and handle it lawfully.
 - (b) “So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are *available*; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly” (vv. 38-39).
 - (c) We always get into trouble when we take matters into our own hands rather than appealing to lawful authority.
 - (d) Remember, God ordained authority to praise those who do what is right and to punish those who do evil (Rom. 13:3-4): it doesn’t always work that way, but often it does.
- (iv) Fourth, he warned them of the consequences they may already be facing for their riot:
- (a) “For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no *real* cause *for it*, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering” (v. 40).
 - (b) Since these men had done nothing wrong, the Ephesians wouldn’t be able to justify their actions before the higher authority.
- (v) And so finally, he dismissed them (v. 42).
- (a) His wise counsel calmed them down.
 - (b) And he was able to send them away to their homes.
 - (c) This is what a magistrate is to do – mediate, uphold the law and establish order.
- b. The point is this is what the Lord used to protect Paul and the Gospel.
- (i) The Lord’s answer to prayer isn’t always supernatural.
 - (ii) Most often He uses what He has already ordained to accomplish His will.
 - (a) If we’re sick, He may use a doctor to heal us.
 - (b) If we’re in financial need, He most often provides us with an opportunity to work.
 - (c) Sometimes He even uses the authority of the state to protect His messengers from their enemies.
 - (d) He overrules all things for the good of His church and His own glory.
 - (e) And so let’s learn to trust the Lord and not be afraid. As we do His work, there will be opposition, but the Lord is able to protect us, preserve us and give us the opportunity to continue that work until He has completed it. Amen.