

Ephesus, Novi and Me: It's Time to Grow Up

Exodus 16:21-35
Acts 19:23-41

October 22, 2017
Faith Community

The city of Ephesus was one happening place. Located in modern day Turkey, its population of more than 250,000 made it the second largest city in the world. It was a political and cultural powerhouse with a warm climate and fertile soil. It was truly one of the crown jewels of the Roman Empire.

It was also home to the temple of the Greek goddess Artemis. While there were thirty-three places in the Mediterranean world where Artemis was worshiped the temple, a mile and a half northeast of Ephesus was the center of it all. It was cared for by internationally known artists and craftspeople, and was considered one the Seven Wonders of the World in its day.

An attraction like that always results in satellite industries. There'll be hotels, restaurants, and tour buses. There'll also be souvenirs galore since you'll surely want something to help you remember this monumental time, and you can only get it here, now, from this helpful merchant, and only while supplies last, so step right up.

This is precisely where the going gets tough for the apostle Paul and the small missionary church of Ephesus.

Enter Demetrius. He was a silversmith who made shrines, symbols and images for pilgrims to purchase when they visited the world famous temple of Artemis. He and his boys had a good business going until Paul showed up with his Jesus talk. Since then the tourist trade had fallen off and the numbers didn't look good down the road, and what are we going to do about it?

Watch the progression here. Watch this closely. Demetrius is a skilled craftsperson. He's also a crafty manipulator. He calls his partners together and says to them,

You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here and in the whole province of Asia. (Acts 19:25-6)

It's a business issue. However, Demetrius accuses Paul of deceptive practices, which bumps things up a bit. Then he says it's not just happening in Ephesus, which makes it all the more urgent. Then he amps it up even more. Watch this:

There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of Artemis will be discredited. (v. 27)

And we have liftoff! That's all it took.

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (v. 28)

They got God and Country going. From that point on, what had been a financial downturn was skillfully turned into a crisis of faith that threatened the world.

Do you know people who do that? You think the issue is one thing, but before you know it it's something very different, and you're wondering what in the world is going on as people get bent out of shape over something that's blown way out of proportion. Has that ever happened to you?

Watch this, friends. Business was going downhill for a small group but it turned into this:

Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized....Paul's traveling companions, and all of them rushed together into the theater. (v. 29)

The theater was used for all kinds of public gatherings. It held 25,000 people, a perfect setting for a manipulator, and that's where they went.

Sometimes it's easy to get a mob riled up. You throw out a buzzword or catchphrase, and do it often enough, and by gosh you've got a following. You play on people's emotions and keep logic out of it.

The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. (v. 32) But they were there. And they helped Demetrius make his point.

I have two quotes for you, and I want you to listen closely.

“People can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they’re being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works anywhere.”¹

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually believe it. It thus becomes important to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie.”²

Those comments came, first of all, from Hermann Goering, and secondly from Joseph Goebbels, both architects of the Nazi war machine of World War II. And the world was plunged into darkness from which millions never recovered.

And in Ephesus,

The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. (v. 32)

It’s fascinating to see how all this turned out. The town clerk took over. He was actually the man in charge, the CEO if you will, who brought the mob back to reality. He said, first of all, they were flat out wrong. He also pointed out that if word got back to Rome about this the military would crack down in no uncertain terms. So the power of a mob was trumped by the power of the greatest military machine in the world.

Friends, Demetrius is alive and well to this day.

- Watch the pot stirrer who lays the problems of the world or the country at the feet of a certain religious or ethnic group, political party or fuzzy conspiracy.
- Watch the person who blames others and excuses him/herself.
- Watch the person who says ‘I don’t have a problem. If you’d just get off my back things would be OK.’

Friends, being a disciple of Jesus is all about growing up. Sunday morning religion is never enough. Instead, you need discipleship.

¹ Hermann Goering, as cited in <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/politics/2.html>

² Joseph Goebbels, as cited in <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/politics/3.html>

Disciples are people who are becoming more like Jesus in their character and emotional and spiritual development.

Friends, the world is aching for the clarity of conviction born of the reality of the living Jesus Christ. Don't squander this opportunity!

Don't mark time until the new pastor gets here. Instead, use this vacancy period as a time to grow in wisdom, discernment, and courageous commitment to Jesus Christ, the hope of the world.