

What's the Message – Lesson 121

In our study today we see Paul in action, bringing the good news of Jesus to the Ephesians.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we live in a world filled with many dangers, and because we are weak and sinful we cannot stand on our own. We ask that You grant to us the strength and protection You gave to Paul, so that we may fulfill our mission also. Amen.

Last time we gave you some more background, so that you might see the human side of Paul . . . and the people of Ephesus. In this lesson we see Paul begin his work there. The 19th chapter of Acts, verse 8, tells us: *And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.*

Just as he had done in every city before, Paul began in the synagogue with the Jews, attempting to show them that Jesus was the promised Messiah. As before, some believed, but there were always some who attempted to do bodily harm to Paul, and to discredit what he said. So Paul turned to those who accepted his message, and this meant touching the hearts of many Gentiles by continuing his teaching in the hall of Tyrannus. Now, the Bible tells us nothing about this man, but knowledge of the city and other sources helps us to put “some flesh” on him. Tyrannus was probably the owner of a hall, and it might well have been located alongside the main agora, or marketplace. In the center of the agora was a large horologion, a device that combined a sundial and a water clock. This would have served as the official timekeeper for the many shops, to tell them when to take their daily 5-hour siesta break. And that was between the hours of 11 A.M. until 4 P.M.

Now what is so significant about that, you ask? It just so happens that another ancient source tells us this is the very time that Paul would use that hall to teach about Jesus. It can get very hot and humid in Ephesus in the summer – think in terms of Houston, Texas – and workers would abandon their labors in the heat of the day. This worked so well for Paul that he continued doing it for two years, and he reached a broad audience of both Jews and Gentiles bringing them the light of the Gospel of Jesus to replace the darkness of paganism.

Naturally, this brought out the opposition. In particular, a silversmith named Demetrius, who observed that as Paul succeeded in reaching more people with the news of Jesus, his sales of silver models of the goddess Artemis and her temple were declining. So Demetrius, like any good union leader, called the other silversmiths together and whipped them up into a fever pitch for a protest, telling them they must act quickly to save their jobs. Acts chapter 19, beginning at verse 25 tells us what he said. *Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.*

The city was filled with confusion, and they all rushed to the great theater, but many didn't even know why they were there. A man named Alexander attempted to speak to the crowd, but when they recognized him as a Jew, *for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"* Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Remember what we told you in our previous lesson about the acoustics of this theater. Just try to imagine what a noise level must have been raised, because it reached the ears of the city clerk in the upper end of the city, and he came to find out the reason for this near riot. His conclusion was that there was no justifiable cause for this commotion, and he dismissed the assembly. But it was a clear signal to Paul that it was time for him to leave Ephesus.

So Paul sailed north, to Macedonia, and visited the churches he had planted there at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Then, after he had given them encouragement, he went on to Corinth and spent three months there. In all these places Paul was collecting contributions for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Then, a plot by the Jews to kill Paul was discovered, and Paul headed back up to Macedonia, across to Troas, then south past Ephesus to the city of Miletus. There the elders of the church in Ephesus joined him for an emotional goodbye. Paul's message to them included these words recorded by Luke in chapter 20, starting at verse 25: *I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will ever see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. . . . I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; . . . to draw away the disciples after them.*

And so Paul and his group departed from Miletus, and after making a number of stops, sailed on to Caesarea, where they entered the house of Phillip the evangelist and stayed with him. Acts chapter 21, beginning with verse 9 tells us: *A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."*

And what is the message for us? Can Paul's resolve to carry out the mission God had called him to do, regardless of the price he might have to pay, be a model for each of us and the ministry we have been called to do?

Next time we will see the capture of Paul and his imprisonment.