

Ephesus - The Word at Work

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[0 : 00] Okay, well let's pray and make a start, eh? Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, thank You for Your Word and we do pray this morning that Your Word would do its work in our lives and that through us Your Word would do its work in our society.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I've got a slide to show you up there on the screen. What do you think of when I first show you this picture? I mean, if you were on a party trip to the Middle East somewhere and you came to this temple, you'd be at one of the greatest temples of its time.

Four times bigger than the Parthenon in Athens, that's pretty big. It took 120 years to build. It's around 130 metres long, that's sort of almost like three Olympic pools long.

It's got about 70 metres wide, that's how wide it is. It's got 127 pillars that were up to about 60 feet tall, that's 20 metres tall.

It's made of marble and it was decorated with the relief figures of the Greek mythology. And Diana, well that's Artemis, her statue was inside and made of cedar wood inside.

[1 : 14] If you were to come to some kind of conclusion, what would you say about this temple? Well, if you were an Ephesian who'd become a Christian, if you were someone of Asia Minor who'd become a Christian, you might come to the conclusion that it's nothing.

It's worthless. In fact, it's worthless compared to the true and living temple. It's worthless in comparison to the true and living God, Jesus, who has given you new birth into a living hope through the resurrection from the dead, who's given you forgiveness of sins, who's given you eternal life, who is such as the power of the gospel that you'd be saying, that is nothing.

The preaching of the gospel of Jesus is done with the expectation that things change, that there will be change, that there will be repentance, and that there will be an ongoing repentance.

Regime change, cultural change, worldview change, life change, cities change. It's not assimilation when you become a Christian.

It's transformation when you become a Christian. You don't just add Jesus to your belief system, add him to one of your pantheon of gods in the Hindu world.

[2 : 44] Now, we change our belief system to submit to Jesus as Lord, as God, as Saviour, in every area of our lives. Under his word, we submit.

And that is for our good. That's what we do. One of the lies we need to expose is that when people become Christians, it's bad for them. You've heard people say that?

When people become Christians, it's bad for cultures. Christianity forces people to lose their culture. That is, that's what we're fed in the Western world these days.

But when people from other cultures, ensnared in idolatry and ancestor worship become Christians, their confession is that this is the best thing that ever happened to them.

There's plenty in culture that needs to change. And there's plenty in culture that is bad and wicked and evil that needs to change because culture is made up of people, human beings, sinful humans.

[3 : 47] So when the gospel went into India, for instance, the gospel went forward there through the missionaries who went there, a thing called sati changed.

Widows were no longer required, no longer encouraged from the high caste Hindus to throw themselves alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands, to be burned to death, to be emolluated with them as well.

The gospel changes culture and society. Sadly, that practice is on the rise again in rural India. There are Christians who are openly being persecuted in India today.

And yet, you listen to the academics and they would say that Christianity is what's made India what it could be. When people in the tribes of the Philippines are free from the bondage of the evil demons, they no longer spend their life savings making sacrifices to the evil spirits and being subject to abject poverty.

Coming into the kingdom of God is being rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. And now, we see things in a completely different way.

[5 : 12] And that's a good thing because we see evil for the evil it really is. Now, in Acts chapter 19, we hear how the gospel reveals the truth about idolatry and so overturns the culture of Asia Minor and beyond.

And in so doing, whole industries become in danger of collapse. Gods made with hands are not gods.

That's what we're told. Gods made with hands are not gods. And so you no longer worship man-made gods, but instead worship the God who made man.

That's a major turnaround. You no longer worship the idols made from the creation, but instead worship the creator, God, who brought about the creation. Now, what is an idol?

An idol is something apart from the true and living God that we trust, serve, or set our hearts on for security, significance, or happiness. That's what an idol is. An idol is something that masters us, that we fear.

[6 : 17] It's something that we love or pursue other than the true and living God who made us. It could be a carved or fashioned from wood or iron or metal, stone.

It could be the receiving, the praise of people. It could be the lust for money and the power that comes with it. We're told in the book of Colossians that greed is idolatry.

Martin Luther wrote, to whatever you give your heart and trust your being, that I say, really is your God. The Gospel of Jesus challenges every idol of the world and every idol of the heart.

And brothers and sisters, our Western world is in a perilous situation. At one level, we have set ourselves up as gods and individualism as the greatest good and that is God.

Our society calls us to worship ourselves and to call us to define ourselves in independence of the world around about us. And no one should challenge me and the way I live in this world because I am God.

[7 : 31] At another level, the economy is the God we serve. If the economy is going well, we rejoice and if the economy is going poorly, well, we enforce and endure economic pain to fix it. But the Gospel of Jesus challenges every idol of this world, or at least it should.

Understood rightly, Jesus is the one who challenges every cultural ideology. Understood rightly, Jesus should challenge every cultural situation.

Overturning everything that is not in accordance with His Word, for that is what it means to live with Jesus as Lord. And what we see in Acts chapter 19 is the fruit of Gospel proclamation.

I'll say it again. What we see in Acts chapter 19 is the fruit of Gospel proclamation. Freedom from the foolishness of idolatry. Freedom that brought about an opposition from those who benefited from idolatry.

Now, in chapter 19 verse 21, it says, now after these events, what's just happened? We'll come back to chapter 19, back in the page before. About 12 disciples of John the Baptist have become followers of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 53] That's what's happened. You see it there in chapter 19 verse 5. And Paul has based himself in Ephesus and has been preaching in the synagogue there in verse 8 and teaching about the kingdom of God that Jesus is the king of the kingdom and all that means and explaining to them the way.

That's what he's been explaining to them. Reasoning and persuading them. Then after three months of sticking at it, he finds the Jews hard-hearted. They won't listen. They're stubborn and they refuse to hear what he's got to say.

And so then he goes next door to, well maybe, to the hall of Tyrannus along with the 12 or so new disciples of Jesus. And then after two years, have a look at it there, this he continued for two years, verse 10, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

It's estimated that there are about two million people had heard the word. As those who believed the word of God, took it with them back to the region of Asia.

Ephesus was a sort of crossroads and people would come from all over the realm and they'd come there and they'd meet up and they'd spend time getting a lecture from Paul and stuff there and the hall of Tyrannus and get converted and then they'd go back where they came from.

[10 : 12] I guess some of these disciples went out as well into Asia and about two million people have heard the word of God. And now after a season of extraordinary, extraordinary gospel growth, it's time to move on.

And then he plans, you see there in chapter 19, verse 21, he plans to go from Ephesus to Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia, that's those two regions up there, and sending out his deacons, that is his servants, Timothy and Erastus, are ahead of him but Paul stays back in Asia a little while.

That's what he does. And we see the word then at work and here we see the fruit of the gospel for the word of God has been at work. Look at verse 23.

About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way. Now the way was also mentioned back in verse 9, it's the way of the Lord Jesus.

That's what's causing the offence. And so the way is the road to get somewhere, that's what the way is, it's the course of behaviour.

[11 : 28] You read about the way of peace in Luke chapter 1 verse 79, we hear about the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few in Matthew chapter 7 and in John chapter 14 Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except by Him. And so the way, the way of the gospel, the way of the Lord Jesus has disrupted the trade of the silversmiths in Ephesus.

It's like Uber has disrupted the taxi industry. And when you take away someone's business and threaten livelihoods then people are not going to be happy.

The wealth of the silversmiths has been threatened and the income stream significantly negatively impacted. The silversmiths made shrines to Artemis and a lot of money in doing so.

Artemis is the Greek name that's the same name as Diana which is a Roman name. She is the Greek in religion the goddess of wild animals the hunt and vegetation and chastity and childbirth.

[12 : 38] And she's worshipped not only in in Ephesus but also in Asia but also the whole world you see there in verse 27. And so the world turns and Demetrius gathers up the rest of the silversmiths of that guild and explains the problem to them face to face.

Verse 26 the trade's drying up. They used to make miniature silver niches containing images of the goddess and people would buy them and devote them in the temple.

And notice why the trade is drying up. Verse 26 have it why the trade's drying up. For a man named Demetrius the silversmiths who brought silver shrines to Artemis brought no little business and craftsmen these he gathered together with the men in similar trade and said men you know that from this business with great wealth.

Verse 26 and you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul he's a problem. He's persuaded and turned people away a great many people what's he been persuading and saying saying that gods made with hands are not gods at all.

That's what he's saying. Now that doesn't sound too controversial to us does it? To say that idols are nothing but it should.

[14 : 12] It was super controversial back then and it's super controversial in our world today. It was the word of truth the gospel of Jesus that had spread and done the work changing people as only God can bringing about conversion showing that gods made with hands were not gods so that the people of Asia Minor but not just Asia Minor the whole world had worshipped Artemis so where the gospel goes culture is confronted and idolatry comes straight away to be confronted.

Truth liberates people from the stupidity and the foolishness of idolatry the trinkets that are worshipped the trinkets that are trusted the trinkets that are adored listen to the way that God speaks about it in Psalm 115 let me read to you Psalm 115 you can turn to yourself Psalm 115 it's worth looking at there's other parts of the Bible the whole Bible is full of this sort of stuff but Psalm 115 I'll read it out to you not to us oh Lord not to us but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness why should the nation say where is their God our God is in the heavens he does all that he pleases Psalm 115 verse 4 their idols are silver and gold the work of human hands now listen to this listen to this they have mouths but do not speak eyes that do not see they ears but they do not hear noses but they do not smell they have hands but they do not feel feet but they do not walk and they do not make a sound in their throat listen to this punchline those who make them become like them and so do all who trust in them

Isaiah 44 scathing of idols and adultery as well idols are deaf dumb stupid and unfortunately those who worship the idols end up becoming just like them deaf dumb immobile stupid ignorant but when the word of God is powerfully at work as the gospel goes into the world things change remember the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians it's a favourite verse of mine 1 Thessalonians pick it up at verse 6 and 7 and you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word in much affliction and with the joy of the Holy Spirit verse 7 so you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia for not only has his word the Lord sounded forth from you

Macedonia and Archaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything listen to this for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come that is the kind of response we'd expect when the gospel of Jesus is preached and people believe they turn and they serve and they wait for the Lord Jesus to return that is a major major work and it challenges society it challenges industries it challenges cultures and so verse 27 of Acts chapter 19 the result is a giving up of idols and then that the trade of these silversmiths comes into disrepute that is it loses its reputation it's seen as being a waste of time it's seen as being a bad industry to be involved in as it should that would negatively affect business but also remember that the temple is in danger of being seen as nothing remember the temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the people turned their back on it saying who cares is nothing it'd be like saying that the

Sydney Opera House the icon of Australia at one level would no longer have a procession of people coming towards it it's just going to be defunct well the truth is the temple of Artemis is just a pile of rubble now here's what's left of it just an archaeological site where the animals wander through when the gospel clashes with big business you know there's going to be no little disturbance take the end of the slave trade in England and America it'd been going on 1500 to 1800 or so it had made England and America extraordinarily wealthy it ended and it was come to an end championed by men like Wilberforce who also wanted to make sure that there was an evangelical minister on the first fleet coming to

[20 : 28] Australia as well and he also found the RSPCA along with CMS the Church Ministry Society and many other things ending the slave trade came with resistance from the establishment and those who made their wealth from it well a bit closer to home take the current agitation to change the way that poker machines are played it's been championed by Christian leaders men working together and that will reduce the income of the state by billions of dollars it'll improve the lives of countless families who lose all they have to the casinos the god of money and greed and corruption but the thing to take note of in Acts chapter 19 is a staggering success of this gospel enterprise from Paul and around a dozen men the gospel radiates out into

Asia and the known world such that people are giving up on the worship of false gods and particularly the world renowned Artemis and this is not propaganda right a message by those who would like us to believe it right it's a report from those necessarily opposed to the gospel people the downturn in business is without doubt the result of the gospel of Jesus bearing fruit that's the account of those who are opposed to it as people turn from the way of sin and ignorance and the slavery to idols to the way of Jesus Christ as Lord and God to know the freedom and the forgiveness and the righteousness of worshipping the true and living God who promises life and life to the full the idols take take take the Lord Jesus gives gives gives wouldn't that be something you want to be part of huh that kind of gospel infectiousness going forward wouldn't that be exciting part of something like that seeing that happen seeing the gospel radiated out from

St Lucia into sort of the suburbs around Brisbane and then to Queensland and then to the regions of who knows from just a few of us as the word of God comes to UQ and into St Lucia at one level the place where people come to worship the God of education we can see the gospel go to the hearts of the big businesses in Brisbane as believers take the word to them there through the city Bible forum and forums like that we can see people saved and hearts changed as the gospel people go back to places like Laos and through Tom and Kung who were with us a while ago and others like them as we raise up workers for the harvest field to go to places to be leaders of gospel ventures beyond us like Plainland where

Oliver and Taylor have gone used to be with us or Mackay Papua New Guinea Eurasia but I digress so what happens next the madness of crowds there's a riot in verse 28 to 34 we see a crowd stirred up by the silversmith led by Demetrius and out into the streets probably the streets that goes from the great theatre of Ephesus to the harbour you see the picture here crying out great is Artemis of the Ephesians and this sets the whole city into disarray can you imagine it it be something like the storming of the White House back in January 7 2021 people are there from all over the world America they were not planning on storming the White House necessarily but then in the frenzy of the moment and the crush of the crowd and end up doing what they hadn't planned on doing and not quiet things down but it's prevented by some powerful friends the

Asiaks the high ranking officials in the province of Asia who looked after various provinces they're the Asiaks Asia Ark ruler and these people were chosen annually from the wealthiest and most aristotic families and Paul's friends with these guys got friends in high places looking out for him don't go there the crowds beyond reason you can't talk to a crowd in that situation they don't want to hear what they're going to hear and the mob gets together and without knowing what they're doing there nothing constructive can come out of that mob Alexander is called upon to speak now he's a Jew we're told in the early days of Christianity the way that people of the way that is Christianity people didn't understand that there was a difference between Jews and Christians Jews though we know not Christians but most of the Christians in the first century were Jews but the Christians are not Jews many

[25 : 58] Jews were Christians some Gentiles were Christians Alexander is probably getting up there to explain it's not us it's those guys the Christians they're the problem Paul's and his teaching and so save the Jews from the wrath of the mob but he's howled down and for two hours could you imagine it for two hours the Ephesians cry out I don't want to get you to chant it we don't want to do that great is Jesus great is Artemis of the Ephesians two hours of shouting doesn't prove that it's right that's the way our society works isn't it shout louder shout longer because you'll shout people down because you're right but you're not her time is up Jesus now is worshipped as the true and living God the gods made with hands are not gods and then some reason prevails eventually after two hours they shout themselves hoarse warn themselves out and somehow the town clerk quietens them down and he injects some calm into the this is important stuff to get a hold of he injects some calm into the crowd a calm presence is what's required when the mob is unruly the leader is the quietest calmest person in the room that's who the leader is and then we get the example of settling the unruly mob he affirms the status of

Ephesus he assures them that Gaius and Aristarchus have not spat on Artemis or anything like that not violated the temple go easy he instructs them that there's proper places for dealing with disputes and complaints they're the courts they're open there's people who preside over them bring an objective complaint a complaint before the courts which are always open and then people can complain both ways in these courts notice there in verse 18 verse 38 sorry and finally if there's anything more then bring it to the regular assembly now we know from other sources that they were held three times a month in the civic assembly the same word for church really the assembly is the same word for church just a secular word the civic assembly the same theater where the rioting had probably been happening and that can hold about 25,000 people then after saying these things he dismisses the assembly again the regular word we use for church well what do we see from God's word in

Acts chapter 19 today well I think we see the word of God working at least two ways one converting second confronting conflict conflict conversion and conflict is what we see as the word of God the word of Jesus the gospel of Jesus preached people are converted that is they changed and they worship Jesus Christ as Lord last week we saw that they burnt magic scrolls millions of dollars worth of lucky charms at one level up in smoke this week we see that the people who are converted from worshipping idols to the worship of the true and living God brings about the demise of Artemis and the trade that went with her and whole industries are threatened when the gospel invades society and brothers and sisters that's a good thing that is a good thing that is the power of the gospel bringing people who are dead to life bringing people who want slaves to sin to freedom in

Christ Jesus liberating people from the fear of death and the gods and the evil and the witchcraft and the witch doctors of this world liberating people from freedom to the gods liberating freedom from the cultures of death and destruction and it brings about conflict it's going to have to bring about conflict conflict I hate conflict I'm conflict averse let me tell you and I'm sure you are as well but as the gospel of Jesus goes forward there will be a clash of cultures as believers come to see the supremacy of Jesus everything else must does fall into line the idols have to go so brothers and sisters what idols have to go as

Christians live with Jesus Lord idols have to lose their attractiveness industries close down temples lose their luster as we see them for what they really are nothing compared to the all surpassing glory of Jesus as the gospel of Jesus changes cultures one person at a time and then there's going to be inevitable conflict with those who do not with Jesus as Lord wouldn't it be wonderful if the gambling industry was shut down overnight I can't stand watching the TV and all you get is the ads that come on about gambling they say well chances are you're about to lose that's true but telling an alcoholic that you can have a drink and that's a good thing for you it's fine that's bad isn't it wouldn't be wonderful if it will only stop if we stop gambling there are many places in Australia and if there were no bets placed there the industry would close down but we're building one right in the middle of Brisbane wouldn't it be wonderful if the pornography industry was shut down the industry that creates misery and destruction for those caught up in it wouldn't it be wonderful if it was shut down because there were so many Christians in Australia that there was no market for it in the exploitation of others it'll only happen if we don't support it but it could happen it has happened can happen when God's powerful word is unleashed in our world and in our hearts as it was from Ephesus into Asia

[33 : 57] Minor and all the world let's pray now father in heaven your word is more powerful than we can possibly imagine we pray that your word would do its powerful work in our lives and the radiate out through us bringing freedom from the captives caught up in the slavery to sin and death and changing our world bringing about good out of evil freedom from slavery and life to the full please help us to turn and to serve and to wait we will sign from heaven we pray in Jesus name Amen happen ■ go in Romans happy up can provoke them continue to try to future 1600 in vain income rainbow iets como pix him