

Introduction

Just like the man behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz (“the Great and Terrible Oz”), today we are going to get a look behind the scenes

A. While Paul prepared for his next mission, he continued to take advantage of the opportunity God provided in Ephesus (READ 19:21-22)

1. One of the things we’ve learned about Paul in Acts, is that he didn’t just wander around preaching the Gospel; he was strategic and planned his trips, but also relied upon the direction and leading of the Spirit:
 - a. There were two things that motivated where he went:
 - 1) One was the desire to preach the Gospel to the lost and lead them to Christ
 - 2) The second was to minister to believers and build them up in their faith
 - b. We see both of these here when Luke tells us that Paul “**purposed in the spirit**” (e.g. planned) to go to Jerusalem after traveling through Macedonia and Achaia and then ultimately heading to Rome:
 - 1) Paul’s purpose in going to Jerusalem was to deliver the offerings he collected from the churches in Achaia and Macedonia:
 - a) Paul mentions this in Romans 15:25-28 (READ)
 - b) He also mentions it in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 (READ)
 - c) Luke mentions in v. 22 of our passage today that Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on into Achaia and Macedonia ahead of him, and the reason was so that they could make sure the churches were ready for Paul to come and collect the offering
 - 2) If we keep reading in 1 Corinthians 16:4-7 (READ) we see that another purpose of traveling through these regions on his way to Jerusalem was to minister to believers in the churches there
 - 3) Finally, his purpose in going to Rome was to preach the Gospel (READ Romans 1:13-15)
 - 4) So, Paul always had these two things in mind when planning his next mission—preaching the Gospel to the lost and ministering to the saints
2. Even though Paul was planning for his next mission, he wasn’t quite ready to leave Ephesus quite yet:
 - a. Luke says that after sending Timothy and Erastus on ahead, he “**stayed in Asia for a while**” (22):
 - b. If we go back to 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 (READ), we see why:
 - 1) Initially, he intended to stay in Asia until Pentecost because the Lord had provided him with a “**wide door for effective service**” and he was intent on taking advantage of it as long as it remained open
 - 2) Unfortunately, he also mentioned that there were “**many adversaries**”, some of whom we will see in a moment

- 3) Luke doesn't say how long Paul stayed in Ephesus after he sent Timothy and Erastus away, but it was less than a year because v. 10 states he had been there at least two years, and 20:31 says his total stay was no more than three years

B. Satan Pushes Back (19:23-34)

1. You may wonder why I've titled this section "Satan Pushes Back" when—as we'll see in a moment—there no mention of him in these verses; so I want to build a case for why I believe that's what we will see next in our passage:
 - a. You may remember that last week I mentioned Ephesus was considered the magic (e.g. sorcery) capital of the Asia Minor:
 - 1) It was home to a large population of Greek and Jewish sorcerers and exorcists, and was known for its supernatural or demonic activity (e.g. demon possession, exorcisms)
 - 2) In fact, most of our passage last week focused on the remarkable impact the Gospel had on converting potentially 1000's of these sorcerers and exorcists to Christ
 - b. Ephesus was also the center or headquarters of the largest religious cult in the Roman empire during the first century—the cult of Artemis:
 - 1) Artemis (Roman Diana) was mainly the Greek goddess of fertility and virginity
 - 2) There were 33 different temples dedicated to Artemis throughout the Roman empire but the largest and most magnificent was in Ephesus:
 - a) It was the largest structure in the Greek world, four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens, and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world
 - b) The base of the temple was 425 feet long by 225 feet wide, with the temple itself measuring just over 350 feet by 160 feet
 - c) It was constructed entirely of marble and had 127 columns standing 60 feet in height and six feet in diameter; 36 of these were gilded with silver and gold
 - d) The inside was incredibly ornate and filled with great pieces of art
 - e) It also included a large statue of Artemis herself and an altar large enough to sacrifice hundreds of animals at the same time
 - f) Hundreds of priests, priestesses, eunuchs and prostitutes served in the temple performing religious rituals for the thousands and thousands of worshippers
 - g) It also served as one of the largest banks in the ancient world because people would bring their silver and gold and store it as the temple for safe keeping
 - h) The temple was the pride and joy of Ephesus and because people from all over the world to see it, it made Ephesus not only exceeding wealthy but the center of Artemis worship
 - c. When we consider these two great influences over Ephesian culture and society—magic/sorcery and the false pagan religion of Artemis—we see the grip Satan had over the region:
 - 1) We see this reflected in Revelation 2-3 when Jesus addressed the seven churches; all seven were from Asia Minor and the list includes Ephesus
 - 2) When talking to these churches, Jesus mentions Satan four times:
 - a) He referred to the Jewish synagogues in Smyrna and Philadelphia as **"synagogue[s] of Satan"** (READ Revelation 2:9; 3:9)
 - b) He referred to Pergamum as the place where Satan dwelt and where his throne was (READ Revelation 2:13)

- c) Finally, he referred to some of the false teaching in the church of Thyatira as **“the deep things of Satan”** (READ 2:24)
- d. So, as we consider this, how do you suppose Satan would respond when his influence over the region is being challenged and he is losing his grip?
 - 1) Paul’s preaching of the Gospel has already had a tremendous impact on one of Satan’s strongholds: what was likely 1000’s of magicians and exorcists coming to Christ, confessing and repenting of their practices, revealing their secrets, and burning millions of dollars’ worth of books
 - 2) We are now going to see what happens when Paul’s preaching of the Gospel impacts Satan’s other stronghold—the false religion and cult of Artemis
2. Paul’s preaching of the Gospel led many to accept Christ and reject false religion:
 - a. The impact this was having was causing some in Ephesus to be troubled (READ 23-24):
 - 1) One individual who was troubled by the impact of the Gospel was named Demetrius, a silversmith who contracts with local craftsmen to make silver shrines to Artemis—these were miniature replicas of the temple and Artemis which were sold to worshippers
 - 2) The business was a lucrative one because of the thousands and thousands of visitors that came to Ephesus
 - b. So, Demetrius gathered the craftsmen and workers of similar trades, likely those who made shrines out of terracotta, wood, and other metals (READ 25-27):
 - 1) His first concern was the loss of prosperity:
 - a) They made their living selling shrines, but Paul’s preaching had **“persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people”** convincing them that **“gods made with hands are no gods at all”**
 - b) What a great testimony to Paul’s influence and the power of the Gospel—in fact, Demetrius says this was happening not just in Ephesus but all of Asia
 - c) Some scholars and commentaries suggest that Demetrius was using hyperbole here to work up his fellow tradesmen, but there’s no need to downplay Paul’s or the Gospel’s influence; both v. 19:10 and 19:20 make it clear that all in Asia heard the Word of God and that it was growing mightily and prevailing
 - d) As a result, fewer and fewer people were buying the religious relics and it was having an impact on one of the major industries Ephesus
 - 2) His second concern was the loss of reputation (READ 27a):
 - a) In other words, their trades would become discredited or of no value
 - b) I liken this to the way that personal injury lawyers (aka ambulance chasers) have given all lawyers a bad name
 - 3) His third concern was the loss of religious influence (READ 27b):
 - a) The temple would be regarded as worthless so no one would visit any more
 - b) As a result, Artemis would lose her influence all over Asia
 - c. The threat of losing their prosperity, their reputations, and their religious influence was enough to cause a riot (READ 28-34); I won’t go into much depth due to time but simply want to point out a few things:

- 1) The first thing to notice is that they were filled with rage: this is often the response by those who are confronted by the Truth, especially when it involves the Gospel
- 2) A second thing to notice is the violence:
 - a) They apparently couldn't find Paul initially, so they drag two of his traveling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, into the theatre
 - b) The danger was great enough that when Paul wanted to go into the theatre to make a defense, some of Paul's friends, political leaders, persuaded him not to go in
- 3) A third thing to notice is the confusion: twice Luke mentions the confusion caused by the riot, first regarding the entire city and second regarding the mob itself (29, 32)
- 4) A fourth thing to notice is the ignorance:
 - a) Notice in v. 32 that the **"majority did not know for what cause they had come together"**
 - b) What's striking is that even when Alexander took the stage and tried to talk, they simply shouted him down (REREAD 19:34)
 - c) They didn't even care that they didn't know why they were there!!!

Isn't this what we saw with the recent riots across our nation? Most of the rioters weren't there to protest racism or so-called police brutality; they were just there to riot, burn, destroy, and loot

3. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, I believe what we see here is Satan pushing back:
 - a. He was losing his grip on many of the magicians and exorcists
 - b. He was losing his grip on many who worshipped the false goddess, Artemis
 - c. He was ultimately losing his grip on Ephesus and Asia Minor and he wasn't going to let go quietly
 - d. This is how Satan works—he sows confusion, dissent, rage, and violence and uses the masses to do his bidding, all in an attempt to shut down the proclamation and advance of the Gospel:
 - 1) 2nd Corinthians 4:4 says that Satan has **"blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"**
 - 2) In John 10:10 Jesus said that Satan **"comes only to steal and kill and destroy"**
 - 3) 1 Peter 5:8 says that he **"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"**
 - 4) 2 Timothy 2:26 says that some are caught in his **"snare"** and being **"held captive to do his will"**
 - 5) Ephesians 2:2 says he is **"now working in the sons of disobedience"**
 - e. It should come as no surprise that when the Gospel was prevailing so profoundly in Ephesus and Asia Minor that he would push back by riling up the masses and causing a riot

C. The Lord intervenes through a local government official (READ 19:35-41)

1. So far in the book of Acts we seen a mixed bag from government officials:
 - a. Sometimes they've persecuted and abused Christians like when they arrested, beat, and threw Paul and Silas into prison in Philippi

- b. At other times, they've protected Christians like Gallio did Paul when the Jews at Corinth dragged Paul before the judgement seat
- 2. Here we see another example of a government official (a town clerk) intervening in a way that prevents the mob from committing further violence against Christians:
 - a. I'm not going to go into details about his speech, except to say that his motives aren't necessarily to protect Christians, but rather to prevent upsetting Rome (something a riot certainly would have done)
 - b. However, much like we saw Satan behind the riot even though he wasn't mentioned specifically, we know that God is ultimately the One behind the city clerk's actions here as well:
 - 1) When Pilate claimed to Jesus that he had the authority to release or crucify him, Jesus replied, **"You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above"** (John 19:11)
 - 2) Paul wrote in Romans 13:1 that **"there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God"**
 - 3) Proverbs 21:1 says, **"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."**
 - 4) What this means is that the Lord is sovereign and uses government officials to accomplish His will—this is something we see continuously throughout the Old Testament as God uses nation after nation, and king after king, to accomplish His plans for Israel
 - 5) So, while don't see God mentioned specifically by Luke in this passage, it's clear that as Satan pushed back by creating a riot, the Lord put an end to it through the actions of the city clerk

Conclusion

I think the three takeaways for us from this passage are these:

- 1. Satan is the ultimate source behind the chaos, corruption, wickedness and sin we see happening in our nation and our world today—he's the hidden enemy, working behind the scenes to manipulate and control the masses in an effort to derail God's plan and purpose
- 2. The Gospel should be our weapon of choice (Romans 1:16-17)
- 3. However, we can rest assured that God is still sovereign and ultimately in control, even when it comes to our own government and those of other nations:
 - a. He will use it to ultimately accomplish His purpose
 - b. Sometimes we may suffer at the hands of our government, much like Paul, but at other times He will use it to provide protection and relief
 - c. Either way, He will ultimately use it to thwart Satan's plans and accomplish His plan
 - d. As we've seen in Acts from the very beginning, the Gospel will continue to advance regardless of the opposition it or the Church faces