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STUDY FOR SERMON FROM 9.17.23

SUMMARY

In chapter 19, we join Paul on his third missionary journey, where he preached the gospel throughout Asia Minor. As is the case most everywhere Paul went, we find that his message—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is often met with controversy, violence, and discord. Despite the hostility Paul encounters, God repeatedly delivers him and his companions. As Paul journeyed into new territories, his confrontations often centered around idolatry. Paul would present the truth of Christ and—as always is the case—allow the gospel to expose false religion. In the ancient world, there arguably wasn't a culture more infected with idolatry than at Ephesus. It was here where the Temple of Diana stood—a structure known throughout the world dedicated to the "fertility goddess." Paul not only exposed Diana as a false god, but in so doing, he undermined the business of the local silversmiths who made images and souvenirs for visitors who came to see the temple; people began to turn away from the temple. The silversmiths protested Paul's actions, and this caused the locals who remained to riot and dragged Paul and his companions into the massive theater at the temple, where they demanded blood. Once again, Paul and his travelers were delivered when the proconsul came forward and quieted the crowd. The proconsul essentially told the crowd that a few preachers couldn't destroy their religion with a couple of sermons. He told the mob to move along, and Paul continued preaching. This account illustrates how the gospel can be divisive—exposing falsehood which people, in their sinful nature, tend to protect vehemently. But it also demonstrates God's faithfulness to the messengers of his Word and the resilience of it. While Diana is nothing more than a historical footnote, the gospel of Jesus Christ spreads throughout the world.

GROUP QUESTIONS

Share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you from the sermon or your direct reading of Acts 19:21-41.

What are some of the idols the church confronts and deals with today? How does the truth of the gospel reveal these particular things to be idols? How do we do away with them?

Have there been instances in your life where you have seen the gospel be divisive? Does that bring you comfort or angst? How have you seen the gospel unite people?

If there's one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of this portion of Scripture, what is that thing?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

As you pray, be sure to include today's themes in what you bring before God.