

## “When Does a Community Takes Notice of the Gospel?”

*Acts 19:21-41*

One of the challenges every church faces is how to get noticed; helping people know you are here. We are far removed from our grandparents' generation when many people attended church services and were aware of churches in general. Today if someone comes into your church for the first time it is usually believers who are here for the weekend and looking for a place to worship.

Many people will google you. We have a website and Facebook, and Google sends us an email telling us how many times someone found you on google when they were looking for a church in Westport. Apparently 2971 times last month people found us, 68 wanted directions and 23 visited our website as a result. So its important to have an attractive, up to date website and an active Facebook page.

But that's for people looking for you already because they want to be in a church and fellowship and worship. Certainly a few are looking for God. But what about the community around us. How do they know we're here? Some churches get noticed because they stand on street corners with harsh messages of judgment or false messages of hatred. On the other extreme some churches get noticed because they compromise biblical principles and advertise an everything goes policy because of a message that God is love [true] but He accepts everything the culture calls love [not true].

So how do we get noticed because we want people to know the true God and His Son Jesus? How do we show our community we care about not just about their eternal needs but their pressing needs now?

While there are many good answers, I think we can see one excellent way a community notices believers from Acts 19 in Ephesus. A few weeks ago we were in the first half of Acts 19 where Paul came to Ephesus and had some unusual ministry opportunities. The first was meeting some followers of John the Baptist who believed John's message that the Messiah was coming but never knew the Messiah came! So Paul explained to them about Jesus and His death and resurrection, they got saved, baptized and that was affirmed by the Holy Spirit.

Then he went into a synagogue, shared the gospel; some got saved, most got mad, so he went to a lecture hall and led many people to Christ and taught them over a two year period. Vv.11-41 describe two incidents that stand out in those 2 years. The first one (vv.11-20) when Paul was allowed to perform miracles including casting out demons. So many people were saved who were involved in the occult that we read in v.19 that they had an occult book burned party. The result?

*19:17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.*

*20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

The community of Ephesus was noticing the gospel. And in vv.21-41 the gospel is going to result in a riot. A riot over the gospel? Yes. Why. Because the community noticed and they didn't like it. So when does a community take notice of the gospel?

## **When the Gospel Dramatically Changes Lives** **(19:17-27)**

Any community will take notice of the gospel when they see the change the gospel is making in people' lives. And that happens ...

### ***By believers speaking about Jesus (vv.17-20)***

We're still in the middle of a section so we're overlapping a bit. Paul and others have been sharing Christ through the Word of God. V. 17 says the name of Jesus was being magnified. Many of them recognized the need to confess their sins and do away with sinful practices when they accepted Christ. The gospel will change your life. The community we live in knows us. Many will see how our commitment to Christ results in a change in where we used to go, what we used to do and how we used to find entertainment. The people who knew us from these things now start to ask, 'Hey, I haven't seen so-and-so around lately. Are they okay?' And someone who knows us says 'Yeah, they found Jesus apparently'. Usually said sarcastically. This is what happens when we share the gospel. As we saw in 19:1-20 the gospel will work because God's Spirit takes God's Word and convicts us of sin and our need for forgiveness through Christ.

In vv.21-23 Paul was planning on where he was going next to share the gospel. Other translations more clearly show that Paul was led by the Spirit to go back to Macedonia and Achaia on his way back to Jerusalem rather than his own personal decision. But for Paul to be planning where to share the gospel shows us our need as

### ***Believers to be thinking about sharing Christ (vv.21-22)***

We are far more likely to share Christ if we're thinking about it and praying about it. Asking the Spirit to guide us to whom and when and how we might share the gospel. When we read our Bibles note verses that can help us share the gospel. Think about how to bring a conversation around to Jesus with someone we know well and converse with regularly. And be burdened for the lost. Paul said 'I must visit Rome' because Rome was the largest city in the world at that time full of lost and hopeless people. Paul was burdened for Rome because he was burdened for people who had no hope in this life nor the assurance of the next. The gospel gives us the assurance of an eternity with God after this life but also the confidence of God's presence in our life now resulting in joy and peace because we have purpose and know God is working and in control of our life.

I believe Luke mentions this here, before Paul leaves Ephesus, to show us that Paul didn't leave Ephesus because of the riot in the next few verses. He left because he was already planning on leaving before.

Things have gone surprisingly well in Ephesus. Many lives have been changed for the gospel. Yet now there "*arose a great disturbance about The Way*". The words 'great disturbance' translate the literal 'no small disturbance'. Disturbance implying anxiety and great worry. Demetrius, the head of a trades guild particularly involved in making small idols of Artemis and miniature temples "*brought in no little business*". Exact phrase as no little disturbance; in other words he was wealthy from many people buying statues of Artemis or the temple and then bring them to the temple of Artemis where some religious guy would 'bless' them and promise you good luck and long life or lots of children.

But the gospel was disrupting that. So much so that Demetrius is noticing less sales of Artemis statues and the Artemis temple crowds thinning somewhat. What's going on? Lives are being changed by the gospel.

Demetrius claims Paul is going around telling people that hand made gods are not gods at all!! In v. 25 he says it clearly *"we receive a good income for this business"*. Now business is hurting. The community is noticing the gospel! How?

### ***By believers impacting the culture (vv.23-27)***

Less people are worshipping Artemis because now they are worshipping Jesus. When people hear the gospel and the Spirit leads them to Christ, then they are convicted of sinful habits and lifestyle characteristics and some gradually and some overnight change their lives.

When you read of major revivals in history we read that saloons, bars and brothels all suffered because so many people got saved, changing their lifestyle. Of the 1904 Welsh revival in England J Edwin Orr wrote,

*Drunkenness was immediately cut in half and many taverns went bankrupt. Crimes were so diminished that judges were presented with white gloves signifying that there were no cases of murder, assault, rape or robbery. The police became unemployed in many districts. Stoppages occurred in coal mines not due to unpleasantness between management and workers but because so many foul mouthed miners became converted and stopped using foul language that the horses that pulled the coal trucks in the mines could no longer understand them.*

This is what the apostle Peter referred to in 1 Pet. 4:3-4

*<sup>3</sup>For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. <sup>4</sup>They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.*

While many people were overjoyed at the gospel giving them hope and new life, the Demetrius' of the world also noticed and weren't happy. He said it was so bad that

*<sup>27</sup>There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."*

While Demetrius didn't acknowledge it, the truth is he and many others in the community noticed the gospel's impact

## **When (Their) Sin is Exposed by the Truth** **(19:28-34)**

The community didn't like that their sinful business practices of selling man-made idols yet claiming they would bring divine blessings, were being exposed and as a result people weren't buying it – literally. Jesus is bad for business. Jesus is interfering with my life. Jesus is showing me things I don't want to see or admit. So what do you do? You either ask forgiveness and accept Christ or

***You get angry (vv.28-30)***

Demetrius chose anger and rejection and persuaded many more to respond the same way. After all, if the gospel is exposing my sin and I don't want to admit it, I've got to make the gospel look bad. I have to discredit the gospel or the messengers or make false claims about what the gospel is doing. Demetrius says 'If this keeps up Artemis will be discredited and 'the whole world who worships her' will stop and she will lose her glory.' And more people get angry and a riot breaks out. They were furious and the city was in an uproar. Why were they so angry at the gospel?

### ***Because they were losing their identity (vv.31-34)***

When your whole life is built around a false theory or a foundationless purpose – that which you identified yourself with – your security falls apart. If your identity is in yourself [I'm a good person, better than most] and believe you'll get to heaven on your good works, only to hear that's not true – none of us are good, all have sinned, there is none righteous not one; you need Jesus; then you don't know who you are. You've build your life on sinking sand.

If you believe there is nothing that happens after you die because you believe there is no God and then find out there is a God and you are accountable to Him, then again, you lose your identity. You don't know who you are.

So what does Demetrius do to the crowds? Reaffirm their false identity. Artemis is great! They shouted – literally screeched and screamed – that Artemis is great drowning out any attempts to quiet the crowd when Alexander tries. This is kind of scary because how many times have you watched the news and saw a crowd of angry Muslims shouting 'Allahu Akbar'? Some things don't change. Why the anger? Because the community notices the gospel

## **When They are Afraid of its Influence** **(19:35-41)**

This gospel of Jesus is destroying our way of life. Its pointing out our hypocrisy and sin. Its exposing the weak foundations the world is living by. How does the world respond?

### ***They argue against the gospel through popular opinion (v.35)***

For two hours this crowd is uncontrollable until the city clerk (equivalent to the mayor) steps in and gets their attention. He has authority and he also has the ear of Rome. Rome didn't like unrest of any kind. The clerk doesn't want Rome to hear of this so he has to quiet the crowd. He has to discredit the gospel and reaffirm what they believe. So he re-affirms the common held opinions of most people.

*Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?*

He uses exaggeration and hyperbole as if its truth. He uses a myth of Artemis' image being sent by Zeus from a meteor to earth as if 'everyone knows this'. Do we not hear the same tactics today? Everyone knows the world started with a big bang and that its millions of years old and man evolved over this time? Everyone knows the dinosaurs were wiped out by meteors and evolved from birds? Everyone knows there are many ways to God and if you're good you'll get to heaven? Popularity of agreement is not proof you're right. Just means you're all gullible to believe a lie.

“These are undeniable facts”, (v.36a). ‘Everyone knows’, ‘obviously’, ‘all scientists believe’ ... These are arguments based on popular opinion not facts. And then they

### ***Encourage silence (vv.36b, 40)***

Be quiet, do nothing rash. Why? Because Rome will hear of this (v.40). See if more people hear of truths about God that means some might investigate it and find out the truth! We can't have that now can we? This clerk actually makes some correct assessments of the gospel.

*You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.*

The gospel doesn't hurt society it benefits people. It improves life because those who walk with Jesus learn to love everyone better. But don't let people know that. Keep it quiet. Let's let them believe Jesus people are narrow minded haters not open hearted lovers who want God's best for you. And that will mean making better choices that improves your life based on what God wants for you. When you really press the opponents of the gospel

### ***They admit the gospel isn't harmful (vv.37-40)***

The clerk suggests if they actually have any legal issues with the gospel to seek the proper channels; go to court. But that was already tried in Acts 18:14-17 under Gallio the proconsul when the Jews in Corinth tried to take Paul to court and Gallio threw them out of court. Because it's not a legal issue. If unbelievers are honest they'll admit the gospel does not harm people. But that's a message those who hate the gospel don't want people to know. So now we see even in our own day governments trying to silence the gospel through legal means, trying to intimidate and manipulate the public that we have harmful ideas and practices that will take us back to the stone ages, etc. ...

So what's the best way for our communities to notice us? For us to share the gospel and live it out. Show those around us we want to help them find God and improve their life. Speak truth in love and find practical ways of improving the quality of people's lives here. There's a lot of false information and misunderstanding about Christianity right here in our own communities. What's the best way to disprove that? To live it out and tell people who Jesus really is and what He has done for them and wants to do for them.

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