

## 240609am Sermon Transcript

Andy Cole

Acts 19:23-41

*(This sermon transcript is an extract of a video recording of the full service. The numbering is auto-applied and reflects the number of minutes into recording that the transcript relates to.)*

47:56

Well, can I add my greetings to you this morning? It's, it's great to be over here with you and Emmanuel. Let me pray for us once more.

48:07

All mighty gods. We

48:09

we know that these lives that we're living in this life, Lord, are fleeting

48:15

and we pray, Lord, know that as we

48:18

open up your word together, Lord, you will help us to be mindful of eternity.

48:23

Well, thank you that you love us

48:26

and that you've given us your word to speak into our lives so that we would know not only how to live this life, but that we might be ready for the life to come.

48:37

So please use Your word this morning.

48:40

Lord, You know each one of us intimately. Speak Your truth into our lives,

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that we pray that we wouldn't just be informed, but that we would be transformed.

48:50

That your Spirit would take Your word and

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renew our minds.

48:55

So please help us Father

48:57

Speaker and here are alike. We commit our time to you now in Jesus name,

49:02

Amen.

49:07

Well, I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that our society today

49:11

is is dominated by culture wars.

49:15

What I mean by that conflicts between different groups in society who clash

49:21

over their beliefs and values.

49:23

We see these conflicts stirred up often on social media, but they they can spill out onto the streets in in riots.

49:31

People are fighting over all kinds of things. They're fighting over politics. They're they're fighting over traditional or progressive moral values, fighting over issues of race or climate change. There's so many issues

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at the same time we're we're seeing that robust and reasonable and respectful debate is rare.

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Nuance and subtlety is not allowed.

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We've all got to take our stand in a polarised position.

50:03

I was Christians. We

50:05

we might wonder, how should we be responding

50:09

to the culture wars?

50:11

How should we be speaking and acting in a society that's increasingly hostile to our faith and our values?

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I, I don't know many of you here this morning,

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Some of us might be tempted to retreat, you know, burned down the hatches, curl up in a ball, you know, pray for, for revival or judgement to come.

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Other business may be tempted to go on the offensive.

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You know our hackles are stirred up. We we want to throw verbal hand grenades at every opportunity, becoming angry critics of our culture.

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I suspect that most of us are somewhere in between

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those two extremes,

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but either way, culture wars are nothing, nothing new.

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You can probably tell by my accent. I grew up in the West Country in Somerset in the 1970s, and just around the corner from my house there was a Salvation Army meeting place.

51:11

And once a week the sound of the Salvation Army brass band would some come suddenly into our house. And me and my best friend David Jung, we'd run outside. They'd be marching down the road. I don't know if you've seen a Salvation Army band walking along

51:29

in their military uniforms. We would meet my friend David. We, we get at the back of the, the, the, the grip and we'd March behind them pretending we were soldiers. You know, we'd have sticks for rifles. We thought it was a great, great laugh

51:44

and they would have an open air ServiceNow. Back then in the 70s in, in Somerset,

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these were kind of tolerated, you know, quite peacefully. But it wasn't always the case.

51:55

Back when the Salvation Army started in the the late 1800s, William and Catherine Booth, they had a real heart and a burden for those living in poverty in East London.

52:06

If you know the period, it was a time of massive social change.

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Thousands of people had come from rural areas to live in the cities and as a result there was there was massive poverty and overcrowding, disease, filthy conditions.

52:23

The Salvation Army, they set up shelters and soup kitchens for the homeless. They they they had homes for women fleeing domestic violence and prostitution.

52:35

About seeing first hand the devastating effects of alcohol. They often preached against it

52:42

and that brought them into sharp dispute with many people in the in those cities there are some who sought escape from the squalor down the pub. They would drown their sorrows with cheap beer

52:56

and they didn't take kindly to the the message that the Salvation Army had. And so they would form these bands called Skeleton Armies. I think we've got a picture of of them. They had banners with skulls and crossbones on them. They would follow the Salvation Army when they were trying to do an open air service. They they throw bricks at them. They throw dead rats at them,

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did everything they could to try and disrupt them,

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and the local authorities didn't really know what to do. They tried banning the Salvation Army from having open air services. They even took the leaders of the Salvation Army to court

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trying to prosecute them for breaching the peace.

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Well, eventually the authorities realised what was going on. They came to their senses and they they realised it wasn't the Salvation Army breaching the peace,

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it was their violent

53:49  
opponents.

53:52  
Well, there's another cultural conflict, a much earlier one that we find here in our passage in Acts chapter 19. Please have that that passage open.

54:00  
And I think this, this incident in the life of Paul, can help us

54:06  
be equipped to deal with culture wars in our own day.

54:11  
And I've got two lessons I want us to learn from this this passage this morning.

54:18  
The first lesson

54:19  
is that the gospel is offensive,

54:23  
so be prepared. The gospel is offensive,

54:27  
so be prepared.

54:29  
Now, despite the caricature that many assume of Christianity,

54:34  
the Christian faith is a peaceful and tolerant faith.

54:39  
Now we could admit there have been times in history when those in the name of Christ have tried to impose their faith with with violence even, and that was completely wrong.

54:51  
We can acknowledge that even today, the way some professing Christians speak and communicate, especially on social media, can be rightly criticised as harsh and aggressive.

55:04  
The Gospel never sanctions that.

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How did the gospel spread in the early church? How did it spread in the book of Acts?

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Not through violence and intimidation,

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but through the preaching of God's Word

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and the good deeds of God's people.

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There's one historic piece of evidence for this, not just in the Bible, but there was a, a Pagan Roman emperor, the last Pagan Roman emperor in the 4th century, guy called Julian the Apostate. He wrote a letter that we've got preserved and he was writing to his his Pagan priests and he was bemoaning

55:45

the church, bemoaning all the good that the that the church was doing. He says to his priest, while the poor are neglected and overlooked by our own priests, the impious Galileans, that's his name for Christians. They devote themselves to charity. They support not only the their own poor,

56:07

but ours as well.

56:10

And it begs the question, if the church, the early church, was so well known for its kindness, its compassion, its good deeds, why was it so often opposed with hostility?

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It was because it's message

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was offensive

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in one way or another. The gospel will offend people, their beliefs and their values in every culture.

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An extract to 19 is an early example of this.

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Matthew really hopefully set the context for me. I thought you're gonna see, say, my whole sermon, Matthew, as you were setting it up. But thank you for that. Paul's in Ephesus, which if you don't know where that is, it's in modern day Turkey. And he's been there for two years preaching and teaching God's word. And look there at verse 10, Luke gives us a little pointer there of what's been the result of

all this for those two years of teaching. Because of that, all the Jews and the Greeks who lived in the whole province of Asia

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heard the word of the Lord.

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Paul's having a massive reach and influence through his gospel ministry. More importantly,

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many of those who've heard

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have believed.

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Many have become Christians. And that is what prompted this riot

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in Ephesus.

57:36

You might not know, but Ephesus was the the centre in the ancient world for the worship of the Greek goddess Artemus. There was a temple just outside the city. It was one of the seven wonders of the world. You can see reconstructions of it if you go online. And these 100 marble columns supporting its roof, an incredible sight. And it was a huge attraction to people at that time. Visitors would come to this city. And as a result of that, it was big business for some. Silversmiths particularly earned a a lucrative trade.

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They made these little models of the temple, little silver shrines you could go and buy at the marketplace and then stick it on your your, your mantle piece at home and use it as your place of worship.

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Emphasis was also the centre

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of occult worship at the time. There were many who practised sorcery in different ways,

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but as a result of Paul's preaching of the gospel, many of the people are turning away from their idol worship and their occult practises,

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and that is what's prompting what's going on here

58:52

in chapter 19. This guy Demetrius is a silversmith, and he calls a meeting together of all the silversmiths and all those who work in related trades.

59:03

He when I was studying this passage, the one of the words I came across was a demagogue. I don't know if you've come across that word. I didn't know what it meant. I had to look it up. A demagogue is basically someone who knows how to whip up a crowd, not by appealing to their with their their reason,

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but by sort of stocking their prejudice.

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Kind of a political figure. Well, Dimitrius seems to be quite a a politician, a shrewd politician. Here he gives this speech to the crowd and it's calculated

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to stir up their fury. Look at his speech. Then verse 25. You know, my friends, that we receive a good income

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from this business making these shrines.

59:47

And you see in here, this fellow Paul, he's convinced and let us stray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and practically the whole province of Asia,

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he says that God's made by human hands are not gods at all.

1:00:03

It's ironic, isn't it? The words he speaking.

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There's danger not only our trades gonna lose its good name, but that this temple of the great Artimus will be discredited. And the goddess herself, who's worshipped throughout the whole province of Asia, throughout the whole world, she's going to end up being robbed of her divine majesty.

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Poor Artimus needs to meet Chris

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to stand up for her.



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Well, these guys, they're businesses, depended on the worship of Artemis.

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The gospel to them was a threat

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to that revenue,

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their reputation,

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and their religion.

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And in the light of that, they assume it must be wrong, It must be untrue because it's threatening their lifestyle. They must resist it and oppose it. They don't for one moment stop and think,

1:00:58

maybe it's true,

1:01:00

maybe I would. I should listen to what Paul's got to say.

1:01:05

Well, what was the result of Demetrius's speech? 1st 27 When they heard this, they were furious.

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They began shouting at the top of their voices. Great. Is Artemus

1:01:20

Cities in uproar?

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The crowd sees they can't find Paul, but they find two of his companions. They seize them and they storm into the theatre. We've got a picture of the theatre. You can go and visit it today

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in the ruins of Ephesus. A magnificent theatre could hold about 20,000 people.

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Now, we don't know how many were in the crowd, but

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it was chaos. And look at verse 32, the assembly. All these people who charged into this theatre with Paul's companions, they're in confusion. Some are shouting one thing, some another. Most of them didn't even know why they were there.

1:02:03

Paul wants to enter the theatre,

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he wants to go there. He wants to reason with them, to give them a defence of the gospel.

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But the disciples won't let him.

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They knew he would be lynched.

1:02:19

Even the non Christian officials who are mentioned in this passage, people, they're not Christians, but they're officials in the city. They were friends of Paul. They beg him

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not to go

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into the theatre. They know

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that it's futile trying to reason

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with the mob.

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It's it's worth pausing here and just as Christians today taking note of this, that you know, sometimes, well, all times we need wisdom. If you're a Christian this morning,

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you need wisdom, Don't we, to know how and when to speak

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in a culture that is hostile to the faith?

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Sometimes it's better not to speak,

1:03:03

you know, Jesus said. Be careful you don't cast your pearls before swine.

1:03:08

Sometimes trying to speak to people in certain contexts, they're just gonna trample over

1:03:14

the gospel.

1:03:16

We need wisdom.

1:03:18

Verse 33 mentions some Jews who tried to get a man to stand up in front of this crowd, A guy called Alexander to speak on their behalf.

1:03:27

We're not quite sure what was going on there. The commentators think that they were probably trying to distance themselves from the Christians.

1:03:35

We're we're choosing the city, but we like you. We're friends with you, Ephesians. We're not like these Christians, like Paul. We're not troublemakers.

1:03:44

Whatever. They wanted to do the crowd and are in no mood for listening. What do they do? They shout for two hours nonstop in unionist unison.

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I can't imagine trying to shout for two hours, can you?

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Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

1:04:05

It's just a picture of what people are like, what we are like by nature,

1:04:09

the blindness, the stubbornness

1:04:13

of unbelief. You know, we sometimes think if we just reason with people, we can persuade them to become Christians. None of us are like that

1:04:22

by nature. We're dead in our sins. Needs a miracle of God's grace

1:04:28

to turn us from our sin to God.

1:04:32

We need to pray.

1:04:34

Yes, we need to preach, but we need to pray.

1:04:40

Well, if it wasn't for the intervention of this city clerk, who knows where this would have ended? This guy, he's likely the highest Roman official in FS, the leader of their council, and he comes and addresses the crowd. He tries to reassure them, doesn't he? Calm down.

1:04:58

Your your beliefs, your value, your your values, your your worship of Artemis That's not under threat by Paul or anyone else.

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You need to all calm down or you're gonna get arrested for rioting.

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If anyone's got a substantial legal dispute,

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the courts are open,

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the pro councils are there. Go and present your evidence as it is you're you're in danger of being charged with rioting. And with that,

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the crowd disperse.

1:05:31

One of the reasons Luke records this incident and records the words of the clerk is to to make a point to defend the Christian faith, both then and ever since, that the Christian faith is not

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against rule and order. It's not a threat

1:05:49

to rule and order. The Christian faith does not incite violence or try to impose itself by force.

1:05:58

And yet

1:06:00  
the gospel is offensive.

1:06:02  
It challenges the beliefs and values of every culture whenever people are worshipping living

1:06:11  
for creative things rather than the Creator who gives us life.

1:06:15  
The gospel will offend us. Whenever we base our values not on the the timeless Word of God, but on the shifting sands of culture,

1:06:26  
the gospel will offend us.

1:06:30  
The simple lesson for us this morning is that the gospel is offensive. So be prepared.

1:06:35  
First of all, be prepared to be offended,

1:06:40  
all of us. If you're a Christian this morning, it's because God at one point broke into your life and at first it offended you.

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There's a bit of Demetrius in all of us,

1:06:55  
you know, we, we don't like to be challenged, we don't like to be changed. We assume our views, our way of life are the right way,

1:07:06  
but God in the gospel calls us to repent

1:07:09  
to 180°, turn away from ourselves and our sin, and turn back to God.

1:07:19  
You know, I was watching a, a comedy video recently with my family. There's an American guy called Brian Regan. I don't know if you've come across him, He's very funny. American comedian, not a Christian I don't think but very funny

1:07:31

and one of his little comments he was talking about going to the doctors and he and he medics in the room.

1:07:36

Any GP's here or training to be a medic?

1:07:40

Maybe not, I don't know. But this guy, he said, he said doctors are are some of the only professionals who get paid to insult you.

1:07:51

You know, you go to the doctor and say you need to lose a bit of weight.

1:07:55

You need to, you know, you need to cut out on all the dairy products that you're eating.

1:08:00

We laugh at it, but

1:08:02

talk to us. Yes, they they might say something that challenge us, but they say it with love. They say it with kindness,

1:08:08

they say, because they want the best for us.

1:08:12

You know, it's no accident that Jesus is called the Great

1:08:16

Physician.

1:08:18

He's the ultimate physician who loves us so much. He warns us of our sin.

1:08:25

We are more sinful than we ever imagined

1:08:28

left to ourselves. If we are outside of Christ, we are heading to a lost eternity.

1:08:34

He warns us of that because He loves us

1:08:38

and we are loved

1:08:40

more than we ever dreamed.

1:08:43

God has demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to come into this world to save us, to die on the cross, to bear our punishment, our sins there, so that we can be forgiven

1:08:54

and reconciled.

1:08:58

So repent if you haven't already.

1:09:01

Repent and believe in Jesus. Trust in Him

1:09:05

before it's too late.

1:09:08

But we must count the cost. If we're gonna be a follower of Jesus, we must be prepared not only to be offended and challenged by the gospel ourselves, we must be prepared to be

1:09:19

opposed by those who reject the gospel.

1:09:23

Do you remember Peter's words in his letter? He says don't be surprised.

1:09:28

Don't be surprised if you suffer for being a Christian,

1:09:32

if you suffer oppression or persecution because of the gospel. If you suffer for those reasons, then rejoice that you have the name of Christ.

1:09:47

If we've experienced

1:09:49

the grace of God, the forgiveness of God,

1:09:52

they will help us to endure that kind of suffering.

1:09:57

We won't react by immediately getting angry and aggressive with those who oppose us

1:10:02

because we've experienced God's grace.

1:10:04

It will give us a softness, a kindness

1:10:07

to those who are still in their sin.

1:10:11

As a book I read, if you're recently called *Being the Bad Guys*, I don't know if you come across this by Stephen McAlpine, highly recommend it, *Being the Bad Guys*. And he's writing about this challenge of the the time we're living in.

1:10:24

And he pointed out that in previous generations, you know, the 18th, 19th century, many people accepted Christian faith, accepted Christian values. Christians were the good guys.

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And then as the years went on, our culture became more pluralistic. Christianity became just one option among many,

1:10:46

but today

1:10:48

Christianity is seen as dangerous and divisive.

1:10:53

Christians are

1:10:54

the bad guys

1:10:57

now. We can't stop the world

1:11:00

calling us the bad guys or thinking of us that way.

1:11:03

But Steven Stevens book, he's encouraging us as Christians, we can't stop that. But what we can do is seek to be the best bad guys that we can be,



1:11:16

to love people, to let the love of Christ shine through us even when

1:11:21

people mistreat us.

1:11:25

How should we be responding at the moment to these culture wars? We mustn't retreat into a Christian ghetto, no matter how tempting that is,

1:11:34

and we mustn't go on the offensive, becoming harsh and aggressive.

1:11:41

Now we should follow Peter's instructions. Always be prepared. Always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have in Christ, but do it with gentleness.

1:11:54

Do it with respect, with love,

1:11:59

keeping a clear conscience.

1:12:02

So the first lesson here is the gospel is offensive. So be

1:12:06

prepared.

1:12:08

The 2nd and final lesson I want to bring out of this incident is that the gospel is unstoppable.

1:12:14

So take heart.

1:12:16

The gospel is unstoppable.

1:12:18

So take heart

1:12:21

if you read the book of Acts, really that that is the big theme of Acts, the unstoppable gospel. It runs throughout the book, and it's in the face of opposition and persecution. All through Acts, people keep pushing back against the gospel, fighting against it,

1:12:40

and yet it spreads like wildfire.

1:12:43

It begins with the promise of Jesus in chapter one, verse 8,

1:12:48

just before Jesus ascends back to heaven, he gives a promise to his disciples. He says stay in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and give you power to be my witnesses here in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1:13:07

And that is exactly the story

1:13:09

of the book of Acts. If you if you read Acts carefully, you can see how Luke, the author,

1:13:15

all the way through the book, he keeps putting these these kind of signposts of gospel progress. Every now and again, every few chapters you get one of these signposts. You know, if you've been on a long journey on the motorway and you, you're watching the signpost, aren't you getting, seeing the progress? Well, Luke does that in Acts.

1:13:34

So you see in chapter six he says the word of God spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to their faith.

1:13:46

Signpost

1:13:48

bit later in Chapter 9, Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace and prosperity. It was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased

1:14:02

in numbers.

1:14:03

Signpost, chapter 12. The Word of God continued to spread and flourish.

1:14:11

And then just before this incident, we read

1:14:14

in chapter 19, verse 20, the word of the Lord spread widely. It grew in power.

1:14:22

Even Demetrius, in his speech,

1:14:26

acknowledges this.

1:14:28

Did you notice that Here's a guy who hates the gospel? Here's a guy who's fiercely opposed to the gospel, and yet he acknowledges

1:14:37

the impact it's having. Verse 26. Large numbers of people

1:14:43

are believing this message,

1:14:45

both here in Ephesus and throughout the province of Asia.

1:14:49

The gospel was spreading like wildfire and they didn't like it.

1:14:56

Challenged their way of life

1:14:58

and they saw it as a threat.

1:15:01

Do you know, like many before and and many since

1:15:05

that crowd and emphasis,

1:15:07

they were offended by the gospel and so they resisted it.

1:15:12

There are no different really their pagans in Ephesus, but they're no different to the Jews in chapter 4

1:15:18

of Acts. Do you remember the incident? The Sanhedrin

1:15:22

one and Peter and others are preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin, you know, the religious authorities arrest them

1:15:30

and try to stop them preaching.

1:15:32

They don't want Jesus name to be proclaimed and they think if they just resist the gospel with enough intimidation,

1:15:41

enough force and ferocity that it will stamp it out.

1:15:46

But you know, do you remember Camelia's little speech in the Zahedan?

1:15:53

He had wisdom,

1:15:55

He said. Leave these disciples alone.

1:15:58

If their purpose, if their activity, is just of human origin, it will come to nothing. It will fade away,

1:16:08

but if it is from God

1:16:10

then you're a fool to oppose it.

1:16:13

You'll just be fighting against

1:16:15

Almighty God.

1:16:19

You know enemies of the gospel will come and go.

1:16:23

The church has always faced opposition. Sometimes it's it's verbal abuse, it's mocking, it's intimidation. Other times it's physical persecution by mobs

1:16:35

or even by the state.

1:16:39  
But despite 2000 years

1:16:43  
of opposition, the Gospel has not stopped spreading.

1:16:50  
Be encouraged this morning. The gospel is still the power of God to save all who believe.

1:16:59  
Sometimes God enables the gospel to spread rapidly and spectacularly, like it did in the book of Acts, like it's done at different times in history, in times of great revival.

1:17:12  
But often God accomplishes His saving purposes

1:17:16  
through the slow and ordinary means

1:17:19  
of His people, living faithfully for Him

1:17:23  
in dark and difficult days.

1:17:26  
I'm sure many of you heard of William Carey, the great missionary to India.

1:17:30  
When he was nearing death, the biographer was chatting to him about writing up his life story.

1:17:36  
And they were talking about, they were sort of saying, we want to write this about you and that about you. And he was trying to downplay it all.

1:17:43  
He said, look, if you're gonna write anything about me, if you're gonna be any credit to me, then just say I was a plodder.

1:17:51  
I was applauder. That's that's my highest achievement.

1:17:56  
I can plot. I can persevere

1:17:59  
from my Lord.

1:18:03  
God sometimes rescues His people

1:18:06  
from the sword of persecution, but sometimes He allows the blood of His people

1:18:13  
to be the seed of the Church.

1:18:16  
Dear brothers and sisters, I don't know

1:18:19  
how you are feeling at the moment in the times we're living in,

1:18:23  
but let this word encourage you.

1:18:26  
The gospel Gods word is unstoppable.

1:18:30  
You know that great temple in Artemis?

1:18:33  
I've been to Ephesus.

1:18:35  
All that's left,

1:18:37  
there's a bit of rubble on the ground.

1:18:40  
The worship of Artemus is long gone, but King Jesus is still on his throne.

1:18:46  
Worship throughout the world

1:18:49  
and Jesus is still building his church.

1:18:52

He's promised that the gates of hell will not overcome it. So, brothers and sisters,

1:18:59

take heart.

1:19:00

Press on

1:19:02

with zeal and confidence, not in ourselves,

1:19:06

but in the Almighty God.

1:19:10

Amen.