

Riot in Ephesus

(Acts 19:23-42)

Pre-Session Warm Up

It can be tempting to want to please your friends more than you want to please God. Everyone wants friends. Sometimes we are tempted to do things that we know are wrong just to be accepted by a group of kids at school. [Teacher, share a personal experience that would be age appropriate for your class.]

Our verse today says, “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.”

It should be obvious to anyone that we are not to do wrong, but this verse singles out doing wrong by following a crowd. Why? Because it is often so much easier to do wrong when you are in a crowd than when you are alone. For in a crowd there is often a real pressure to do what they do or risk being laughed at, or worse, actually being physical attacked. We call this being bullied, don't we?

In our lesson today we will learn that a huge crowd of people were led to do something that was illegal just because everyone else was doing it.

Opening Prayer

Father, we want to stand strong for what is good and right. Help us not to be concerned about seeking approval from our friends more than wanting Your approval. Help us to think for ourselves and to desire to live our lives in a way that pleases you, no matter what everyone else is doing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

“You must not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you are called to testify in a dispute, do not be swayed by the crowd to twist justice. (Exodus 23:2)

Lesson

Last week we learned that Paul ministered in Ephesus for two years. His ministry was so effective, that all of the people who lived in the province of Asia heard the gospel.

Many people in Ephesus worshiped the goddess Artemis. In fact, they had a beautiful temple built for people to come and worship her. But the Holy Spirit gave Paul the boldness to tell people that there is only one true God and that idols were not gods at all.

There was a silversmith by the name of Demetrius who made a lot of money making silver statues for people to buy and take home so they could worship the goddess Artemis at home.

Paul was a big threat to his business, so Demetrius stirred up the people against Paul.

Acts 19:23-24

About that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way. (24) It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy.

Demetrius gathered other business owners together and told them that the message Paul was teaching was bad for business because it would make people turn from worshiping Artemis.

Acts 19:25-27

He called them together, along with others employed in similar trades, and addressed them as follows: “Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. (26) But as you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't really gods at all. And he's done this not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! (27) Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her great prestige!”

These business owners were furious! They loved Artemis and were loyal to this false goddess.

Acts 19:28

At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Over and over they chanted until a great crowd started shouting. Soon the streets were filled with crowds and a riot broke out.

Acts 19:29

Soon the whole city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

Two men that Paul had been traveling with were captured by the angry citizens and forced into a large theater. A large mob of people crowded into the theater, too.

When Paul heard that his friends had been taken by the angry crowd, he wanted to rescue them, but his friends were afraid they he would get hurt.

Acts 19:30-31

Paul wanted to go in, too, but the believers wouldn't let him. (31) Some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him, begging him not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater.

Even some of the leaders of Ephesus begged Paul not to go into that theater.

Inside the theater, chaos and confusion filled the air. For two whole hours people were shouting. Most of the people in the crowd had no idea what was going on or even why there were even there.

Acts 19:32

Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there.

Some people in the crowd were shouting but they didn't even know what it was all about. They were doing it because everyone else was shouting. They were just following the crowd.

There's a lesson there for us: You can get in big trouble by just going along with whatever the crowd is doing. Suppose your "friends" think it would be fun to damage someone's property; break some windows, or spray some paint on things? These so-called "friends" have in fact become your enemies if they try to get you to do wrong.

Finally, the mayor of the city quieted the crowd down.

Acts 19:35-37

At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said. "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. (36) Since this is an undeniable fact, you should stay calm and not do anything rash. (37) You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess.

The city of Ephesus was under the rule of the Roman Empire (just like Israel was) and it was the responsibility of the local city leaders to maintain peace and order. [It was possible for them to lose their position and the city could be put under martial law, losing many civic freedoms.]

The mayor told the people the city of Ephesus had rules against unruly conduct and that they didn't have a good reason to be out of control. The Romans could have punished them for the noise and trouble they were causing.

Then he told Demetrius if he had a problem with Paul, he needed to take it to court. He needed to follow the city rules and do things legally. Then the city official dismissed the crowd and Paul was unharmed.

God's enemy Satan doesn't want people to leave his kingdom of darkness. He will do whatever he can to keep people blinded from the truth about Jesus so they cannot be saved. He used Demetrius to cause chaos and confusion, but he did not keep Paul from sharing the Good News.

The riot in Ephesus showed Paul that it was time to move on, but the result of his ministry made an everlasting impact for the kingdom of God. The church in Ephesus flourished because of the faithfulness of Paul and his companions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I am amazed at how Paul remained faithful to You in spite of all the trouble and difficulties he went through. Most of us would have quit if we went through the things Paul did. But Your Holy Spirit gave Paul endurance and confidence and courage to stay faithful and strong. We would like to think that we, too, would be faithful to you no matter what we face in life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game or discussion.

- Who did most of the people living in Ephesus worship? (Artemis)
- Why did Paul's message bother Demetrius, the silversmith? (He was afraid he would lose business.)
- What happened when Demetrius gathered other business owners together and told them that the message Paul was teaching was bad for business? (They started a riot.)
- What happened to the two men that were traveling with Paul? (They were captured by the angry citizens and forced into a large theater.)
- Why didn't Paul go in to rescue his friends? (The other believers wouldn't let him because they were afraid he'd get hurt.)
- What happened inside the theater? (Chaos and confusion broke out. People were shouting.)
- Why did some people in the crowd join in shouting even though they didn't know what it was all about? (They were just going along with the crowd.)
- Have you ever been tempted to do something you know would be wrong just because all your friends are doing it?
- How did the city mayor get the people to calm down and go home? (He told them they needed to follow the rules of the Roman Empire or they could get severely punished.)
- What did the mayor tell Demetrius? (If he had a problem with Paul, to take it to court. He needed to follow the city rules and do things legally.)
- What kept Paul faithful and strong in his ministry in spite of all the trouble and difficulties he had? (The power of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge that the gospel was true.)

