

7-21-24_sermon (Original).mp4

Alright, turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 19 this morning. We're gonna read verses 23 to 34 and, we'll read that in just a moment. We're in week 14 of a 15 week series in the book of Acts where we are looking at how do we, as Jesus people, how do we continue to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth in a post Christian culture? World looks more and more like the 1st century church. How can we authentically and genuinely represent Jesus and do it well? That's what we've been talking about for the last 13 weeks and we're gonna continue for this week and next week as well. And so, we're gonna read Acts chapter 19 in just a moment, but, I am nothing if not a man of the people. As I walked around and talked to everybody this morning it became abundantly clear to me that most of you are just gonna be looking at the British Open on your phone, so I'm just gonna cut it on the television here and you can decide what you want to pay attention to, okay? You're good? No? Good, okay, good. See I'm glad y'all are faithful Jesus people and you know exactly the right answer. So, we're gonna jump in chapter 19 verses 23 to 35. And to set the stage real quick, Paul is in Ephesus, one of the major cities of the Roman Empire. I'll get into more of the detail in a moment. But as so happens, often with Paul, when he goes into this city, as he goes into so many cities, first thing he does is he gets into trouble. Let's read now this story from Scripture. Acts chapter 19 verses 23 to 34. Around that time, there was a major disturbance because of the ways, so that's Christianity, Jesus' people. There was a silversmith called Demetrius who made silver statues of Artemis, which brought the workers a tidy income. He got them all together along with other workers in the same business. Gentlemen, he began, you know that the reason we are doing rather well for ourselves is quite simply, this business of ours. And now you see and hear that this fellow Paul is going around not only the whole of Asia, persuading the masses to change their way of life, telling them that gods made with hands are not gods at all. This not only threatens to bring our proper business into disrepute, but it looks as if it might make people disregard the temple of the great goddess Artemis. She, and after all the whole of Asia, indeed the whole world worships her, she might lose her great majesty. And when they heard this, they

were filled with rage. Great is Ephesian, Artemis, they shouted. Great is Ephesian, Artemis. The whole city with uproar and everyone rushed together into the theater dragging with them the Macedonians, Gaius and Aristarchus, 2 of Paul's companions. Paul wanted to go in and speak to the people, but his followers wouldn't let him. Indeed, some of the local magistrates who were friendly toward him sent him a message urging him not to take the risk of going into the theater. Meanwhile, some people were shouting one thing and some another, in fact, the whole assembly was thoroughly confused and most of them had no idea why they had come there in the first place. The Jews pushed Alexander forward and some of the crowd informed him what was going on. He motioned and was going to make a statement to the people to explain things, but when they realized he was a Jew they shouted together for about 2 hours, great is Ephesian, Artemis. See, y'all, I don't know if you know this, but in North Augusta, I think Matt mentioned it in the welcome, in North Augusta schools start back tomorrow. Way too early to go back to school already. Right? And my girls start back in a week and a half which is far too late to be starting school because they need to be in there already, right? I am done with summertime. Let me just be honest about it. I'm done. And as we talk about summertime wrapping up, for me what I do is I immediately start thinking about the events that are gonna be coming up in the next couple of months and the one that I'm most excited about is football season. Football season is only right around the corner, and you guys, I've got to tell you I love not only watching college football games, but I love going to games. And as I've been thinking about this passage in the book of Acts, I'm thinking about the last time I went to a college football game. It was in 2019. It is not easy for me to go to college games because on Sunday morning I have to preach. So, it's in 2019 and I am not at this time going to the sacred confines of Sanford Stadium, but instead I'm going to a strange and foreign land. I'm going to a stadium that I had never been to before and so I get up early in the morning and I drive over to my friend John's house and I'm wearing the only appropriate clothes to wear to a college football game, black and red. And I get to John's house and he goes no no that's not gonna work, I got a shirt for you and he hands me this disgusting burnt orange color. I wasn't quite sure what to do with it, but he goes, no put it on. And so I put this just looks weird. But, anyway, we make our

way to the stadium and we end up, y'all, in what is one of the most hostile places that a Georgia fan can go, Clemson University. And there I am at Clemson University and John takes me into the game and John has field level passes and so I walk into the field and we are standing inside of Death Valley and I'm listening to the band play and I'm watching everyone stream in. It's not quite 95,000 of your best friends but it's a big stadium nonetheless, right? And I'm sitting there watching and observing it all and slowly but surely people start piling in and eventually and then the music really starts blasting loud and all of a sudden, I'm not prepared for this, but down the hill running 250 miles an hour is the Clemson coach Dabo Sweeney. And he passes us and the crowd y'all goes wild. And it was one of those moments that I will never forget because I am standing there, you know, I am caught up in this whole thing, and all of these folks are standing there going, c l e m s o, you know it. Yeah, n. And I for 4 hours become the most die hard Clemson fan that the world has ever seen. And I am still asking for forgiveness from the Lord for forsaking God's team. However, this is where I was and I got caught up, y'all, in the herd mentality. You know what a herd mentality is? Definitionally, here's what it is. That a herd mentality is when behavior or belief, it conforms. Group where someone belongs, where your behavior conforms because you find yourself in a group and you begin to act and think and behave like everywhere, everyone else that is around you. And I found myself in that moment in Death Valley doing just that. And when we get to this moment in Acts chapter 19, this is the story that we encounter. I want to give you a little bit of background about the city of Ephesus and what is happening because it will set the stage for us as we move forward. Right? Ephesus was a major hub in the midst of the Roman Empire's unique position. It was a port city and so it was able to ship goods out into the greater Mediterranean world, and so strategically really important because on one side there's a port, and then on the other side there's the Via Ignatia, the primary way that the Romans would have transported goods across. And so, Ephesus is one of those cities that is just filled with all sorts of people, with all sorts of backgrounds, with all sorts of religions, but there was one faith in particular, one deity in the city of Ephesus that transcended everyone else and her name Artemis of the Ephesians. You can go back and archaeologically you guys, we have statues of

Artemis that go all the way back to the 8th century BC. And so long before the Romans, Artemis had been a fixture of devotion and religious faith in the city. In particular, Artemis or Diana later on in the Roman Empire. She was the goddess of war. She was the goddess of hunting, and most importantly she was the goddess of childbearing. And so, she had a special place in the city of Ephesus. If you went there you would have found in the time where what was the temple of Artemis. It was known in the ancient world as one of the seven wonders of the world. I want you to think about this for just a minute. You've seen pictures of the Parthenon in Athens. This temple for, this temple for Artemis was over 4 times the size of the Parthenon, and so this space generated all sorts of religious devotion. It generated all sorts of economic vitality and there is a sermon y'all. There is a sermon somewhere where I can talk about how when the gospel comes into a city it disrupts the economy, but I'm not gonna preach about that today because I want to talk Right. Because everybody in the city of Ephesus would have centrally fixated and worshiped this goddess Artemis. And so, when Paul shows up into the city into the passage that I read to you from today, y'all you gotta remember. He's been there for 18 months, almost 2 years now, year and a half, and he has been living with the Ephesians, he's been gaining esteem with them, and all the while what does Demetrius the silversmith say? That this Paul has been going around and saying that gods made with human hands are not gods at all. He's saying that Artemis isn't worthy of our worship and friends, not only is this impacting our books, most importantly is disrupting the status quo of our city. And so, what happens in this story you guys is that the crowd begins to be worked up into a fervor. About halfway through the passage I read it says that everyone rushes into the stadium. Now the stadium in holds, y'all think about this in the ancient world, 25,000 people. 25,000 people who enter into a space and they are worked up because Paul has been calling their values into question. Paul has been calling the things they hold dear into question saying, you are worshiping things that are not worthy of your worship. You're giving your lives to things that ultimately will not fulfill you. And, we need to pay attention to what is happening in this story because what we read is that everyone, all 25,000 of those people, they begin to chant in unison. Great. Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians echoing that she is

the one who they will give their devotion. She is the one who they will give their worship to and while it is easy for us to read a passage like this and go, it doesn't have anything to do with us. Understand something centrally important that these Ephesians, 25,250,000 in the city when they gave their devotion to Artemis, here's the thing, the people that were in that city, they thought they were worshiping a good thing. They were giving their devotion to something that was good, right? This God gives us fertility, this God gives us food, this God gives us sustenance and victory in war, and so when this crowd assembles together and they begin to chant, y'all I want you to remember this is really, really important that they think deep down in their bones that they are worshiping something that is good. We have reached this point in our sermon series, 14 weeks in, where we are now, it really began in Acts chapter 17, Where everywhere Paul starts to go the rhythm is, he shows up in a city, he goes to the synagogue, he preaches in the synagogue, tells everybody about Jesus. Remember, he's not asking them about their opinion, but he's stating a fact. And he gets kicked out of the synagogue, and then he goes to the Gentiles. He goes to people like me, and He goes to people like you. And He goes to the Gentiles and almost every instance from Acts 17 until the end of the book He shows up and he says, turn from idol worship. Stop giving your devotion and your love, stop giving the best of what you have to these idols that are made with human hands. And y'all this is one of those sections where not careful we can lose what is absolutely central to this story, because if you're anything like me and most of us we are all generally in the same mindset, when we think about idols we think about Artemis of the Ephesians, and I'm not gonna put a picture of Artemis up on the screen because it is wildly grotesque and inappropriate, but for those of you who are over 18, go home and Google Artemis of the Ephesians. It is fascinating stuff. And she is a ridiculous idol, and we think of that sort of thing, a religious trinket. If you grew up in church, when you think about the golden calf, when Moses goes up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments or actually the whole of the Torah, and he comes back down and there he finds his brother Aaron and the rest of the Israelites who have taken all their gold and turned it into an idol that they can worship. That's what we think about idols. Silly things that are written off as backwards that we don't have anything to do with anymore, but if

you remember what I talked about just 2 weeks ago, here's what you will understand. That we are making a massive mistake when we think that idols are something that only happened. And what I told us 2 weeks ago and what I want to affirm and talk about even further today is that idolatry or worshiping something else is as alive today as it has ever been, and as I told you 2 weeks ago and this is vitally important that all worship, every single one of us hold something up that has ultimate value. Something that we are willing to give our lives to, and so the question is not if you worship, but the question for as followers of Jesus, what we need to ask is what do we worship? Not if, but what, because we all worship something. If I could frame it for you another way here's what I would say, that worship is our default setting. Worship is our default setting, and if we do not pay attention to that we will go throughout the whole of our lives and we will spend our lives worshiping something other than what God originally intended. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul speaking of the human condition says in Romans 12:4 that we have exchanged the glory of the creator for the created, and it has led us less than what God originally intends. And so, we all worship something. The question is not what, or the question is not if, but the question is what? And, that's what I want us to spend our time talking about this morning because while we might not worship Artemis of the Ephesians, while we might not worship a golden calf, so many of us give our lives to idols, to something bigger, to something that we think will give us happiness. Let's think about that for just a moment, right? Let's think about it. Because for the most part, the longest part of this series, 13 weeks, what I have done you to take the place of the Christian. I've invited you over the course of the last 13 weeks to ask yourself the deep and fundamental question. What does it look like to be faithful to the gospel in a post Christian world? How can you as individuals, and how can we collectively faithfully follow Jesus in a culture that is no longer Christian? That's the whole point of this series, because yes, that is the world that we have arrived in. If you go to any metropolitan city whether it is New York or Atlanta, Seattle or San Francisco, they are firmly in post Christen. We need to understand is that even in Augusta, Georgia y'all, even in the heart of the Bible Belt y'all, that thing is loosening real quickly and we need to be prepared to think about how will we represent Jesus well. So, each week you've gotten to be Paul or you've gotten to be Peter.

Each week I've asked you to think through the lens of the original Christians, but today I actually want to flip the script. Today I wanna ask a different sort of question, and I want you to position yourself not as Paul, not as Jason who goes into the synagogue, but goes in. What I want us to do today is to think about how we, through no fault of our own, I want you to think about how we, because of the herd like culture in which we live, might actually be the crowd. How we, left to our own devices, might be the sort of people who end up chanting great is Ephesian Artemis, great is this thing that we worship, selling ourselves short of what God has called us to be. Because we all worship something and the question is not if, the question is what? And what I want us to understand is that the world that we are living in is shaping up to worship certain things that have nothing to do with Jesus. And some of you are here right now and you might be thinking like, well we don't worship idols, we don't worship other things, and I would tell you that yes, you do. All of us do. One of the books that I want to recommend to you is a book by a man named Tim Keller. Keller wrote a book, this is one of his earlier books called Counterfeit Gods, and Keller was a pastor in New York City in the heart of the post Christian world, and he was writing to skeptics. And part of his goal that we all hold something as ultimate. We all worship something, thing. And Keller's book says that most of us worship the classical 3: sex, money, and power. But what Keller says I think most provocatively is when in the beginning he's trying to convince his audience, convince us, convince that in fact we do all worship something. And what he says at the beginning of Counterfeit Gods, I think, can maybe open our eyes to the reality of how we all worship something. Here's what he says. An idol is anything that absorbs your heart or your imagination more than God. An idol is anything you seek to give you what only God can give. Anything you seek to give what only God can give, if you will take that statement seriously, it is an idol. If I could question just a little bit different, Here's how I want you to think of it. Okay? And I'm I'm serious, if you only hear me say one thing, listen to the next 5 minutes. What is the thing that you cannot imagine your life without? What is the thing that if it were removed from you, you genuinely and seriously ask the question, is my life worth living anymore? What is the thing that you cannot imagine being outside of your life? And if you can answer that question with anything other than Jesus what we

need to understand is engaged in the worship of an idol. And what I want to tell us today is that we are more susceptible to becoming like that crowd in Ephesus than we ever dare imagine. One of the things that I get to do as the pastor of our church, a church like this, is I get invited to go and speak to different groups. Whether it is seminary students, or secular groups, sometimes I get invited to go and speak even to other church staffs. And a few weeks ago I was in Atlanta and I had been invited to share some leadership philosophy with another church, and I go into a room with the rest of this pastoral staff. 10 of them is sitting around the room and I'm there for 2 or 3 hours and it's basically me talking a lot, y'all know how boring that can be, and so I like to general that was a joke you guys, laugh at that, come on. And so, what I like to do is I like to start by asking a pretty simple question. Now, keep I'm in a room with 10 professional Christians. 10 people who get paid to think about Jesus on a regular and consistent basis, and me sitting around the room with these friends I asked this one question, where do you find joy? Where do you find I actually even curtailed a little more, made it more specific. Where do you find joy this week? And it was funny, you guys, because as we went around the room and each person got to give their answer, the first person said, you know, I found joy this week because I got to hang out with my child. I was thinking, well that's fascinating because I'm ready for my kids to go back to school, y'all. I got to spend time with my child and that's where I found joy, and the second person said, I found joy because I was on vacation last week and I got to sit on the beach and see the beauty of everything that is all around. And each person went down the line and gave an answer to the question. One person even said, I found joy last week because I went to a political rally and it was a religious experience, And, I'm thinking what kind of religious experience did you have at a political rally? Where do you find joy? And each person gave their own answer and the most fascinating thing is that of these 10, and not only of these 10, but I will tell you of everyone that I've talked to the most predominant answers are we find joy through our family. We find joy through our children. Joy through our work. We find joy through our vacation, and what is absolutely fascinating to me in all of the times that I have asked this question not once has someone said, this week I was reading Scripture and I encountered the presence of the living God. I was sitting in my

room praying and I felt God speaking directly to me. Where do you find joy? And the reality is if somebody had said that in the moment we probably would have ridiculed them for giving an overly religious answer, but where do you find joy is a direct question. What is that you worship? Where do you find joy? I can't help but think about Psalm 84 where the psalmist going to the temple of God says, better is one day in your house than a 1000 days somewhere. I find joy in God and God alone. And friends, we need to pay attention to the answer to the question where do you find joy? Seriously, I don't want you to answer it out loud, but I know, I know when I asked that question something popped into your mind. If there is anything other than Jesus, we have lots and lots of work to do. And the reason why I'm asking us this question today is because if we are paying attention, what we will begin to see is that so many of us are just like that crowd in Ephesus. So many of us are just like me walking into that stadium and caught up into the buzz that is all around us, not paying attention to what is actually happening. And we are being shaped by our culture to worship certain things. Just like the Ephesians were enculturated to worship Artemis. So, attention, and most of us are not, but if you are paying attention here's what you will see, that what we worship is squarely shaped by the culture that is around us. What is the thing that gives you joy? And, here's what I want you to see, right? The the Ephesians Artemis thought they were worshiping a good thing. She gives us children. She gives us sustenance. She helps us win wars. And we live in a culture that says if you have the right number of kids and you raise them up and they go to the right colleges then you'll be happy. And we live in a culture that says if you get the right job and have the right house then you will be happy. We live in a culture that says if you consume enough stuff then the yearning inside of your bones will ultimately be fulfilled. In a culture that says if you elect the right president of the United States then you can find what you've always been looking for. And we need to be painfully aware that we are being shaped to worship things other than Jesus. And if we aren't paying attention, we will become just like the crowd. Paul knows what he's doing. Paul knows exactly what he is doing because he has been where they were. If you go back and you look at Paul's earliest life, what do you see? But Paul actually worshiped his own power. Paul worshiped his own acumen, Paul worshiped his

own ability to be the best. In his letter to the church at Galatians he lays out his pedigree, he says, I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. I was of the tribe of Benjamin circumcised on the 8th day. I was zealous for the Torah. If you wanted someone who was the definition of success, Paul says, and Paul understood what it is like to worship your own power, to worship your own ability, to think that that is what will lead you to success and to joy, but what I love about Paul is that he had an encounter with Jesus y'all, and when you have Jesus it actually does something to you. It changes your life and he looks back on all his successes, on all of his achievements, and in Philippians chapter 3 here's what he has to say. That I calculate all of that as a loss because knowing King Jesus is my Lord is worth far more than everything else put together. All of the things that I thought would give me what I was looking for. All of the things that culture led me to believe would make me whole, I know now they are worthless because I met Jesus and it changed my life. See y'all, we need to recognize that we are actually sitting in the crowd And if we aren't paying attention, we can get caught up in believing the myth. We can get caught up in believing the lie that culture is telling us that you can have the American dream and you'll be happy. That you can have the children and the successes and then you'll find joy. The human heart, friends, is an idol factory and if we worship anything other than Jesus ultimately we will be let down. And so, what I want you to think about, the only thing that I want you to walk out of this space in your mind today is what do you worship? What do you worship? Seriously, because we all worship something. What do you worship? How are you shaped by the culture that is around us to believe what you believe? My favorite quote is from Saint Augustine, one of the early church fathers, and he famously said this, that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Jesus. And if we know what is shaping us as human beings, if we know how the culture helping us to become who we are then we are in a position and only then to ask the real question what do you worship? And if it is anything other than Jesus, friends, you've got work to do. So with that hanging on your mind and in your heart, I want to invite us to take a few moments and let's pray together. God, we are grateful for all of the wonderful things you've given us today From the music we have heard, God, to to the prayers that we prayed, and now, Lord, as we come to this space, our question this morning for my

friends who are here in the room, for my friends who are watching online, and even for me in my own heart, help us to answer the question honestly. What do we worship? God, help us to see how we are shaped by the culture around us. Help us to be mindful of the myths that we have bought into that tell us if we can have this thing or that thing then we will be whole and fulfilled. Lord, help us to see this morning as Paul so boldly proclaimed that we can count it all as loss once we meet Jesus. Lord, help us to see that he is the only one who can make us whole. May we follow him not only on Sundays, but may we follow him with our lives so that we might find our rest, so that we might find our joy in Him. God be with us as we continue to worship you this morning. This is our prayer. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.