

**Acts 19: 21-41; “Paul Purposed in the Spirit”, Sermon # 70 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
March 6th, in the Morning Worship Service.**

It was during this time when the word of the Lord grew mightily and was prevailing that the apostle Paul began receiving tremendous opposition to his preaching there at Ephesus. He was not only receiving opposition from those Jews in the synagogue who did not want to believe that the Lord Jesus was their Messiah. But opposition also came from this man Demetrius who was a silversmith. His occupation was making idols of the goddess Diana to sell to people. It had been a thriving business for him until Paul had started preaching that those things which are made by human hands were not gods at all. When people began believing this, they stopped buying the idols which Demetrius and others were making.

Although I do want to speak to you about the trouble that Demetrius caused Paul, I even more want to speak to you about how God the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul even through these very adverse circumstances, so that he would be able to fulfill the ministry to which Christ had called him. It says in verse 21 that Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and then also to Rome. These were very ambitious purposes considering the fact that he was going to receive so much opposition from wicked men. But I want to show you that it was by this means that God gave Paul the desire of his heart, which was to preach the gospel of the grace of God in all the places that he purposed to go to; even in every place which the Lord led him.

Let me give you 4 observations on the kind of reasoning which we see taking place in hearts of men in that place at that time. 1st of all, I want to speak to you about how Paul purposed to do what he did by reasoning in the Holy Spirit. 2nd – I want to show you how Demetrius purposed to do what He did by reasoning in the flesh. 3rd – I want you to see how the whole city was thrown into rage and confusion because they didn't reason at all. And 4th – How it was, that the city clerk used the voice of reason to restore order to the city. I believe that as we think about these things that the Lord will teach us many good things about how He can, and how He will, lead us through opposition to fulfill the ministry which He has called us to do.

1st of all – Paul purposed to do what he did by reasoning in the Holy Spirit.

(verses 21 and 22)

Verse 21 says – “When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” “So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.” We should understand that there is a peculiarly rich meaning which lies behind this phrase – Paul purposed in the Spirit. These truly were plans which the apostle Paul himself made, but he did not simply make them on his own. He made them realizing that the Holy Spirit was in his mind and heart, directing him as to where he ought to go in the future. And he would be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit when he made his plans. This is a good policy for ourselves as well, when we make our plans; to remember that it the Lord the Spirit who is there helping us, directing our thoughts and directing us in His way.

When it says of Paul that he purposed in the Spirit, it is the same thing as his having said – If the Lord wills I will do these things. Turn with me over to James chapter 4, verse 13. “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.” “For is your life?” “It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ “But now you boast in your arrogance.” “All such boasting is evil.” “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

So we see here a person who is presuming that his own thoughts are enough, to make his plans, and have all go well. But just because he purposes in his own mind to go to a particular city, and to spend a year's time there, doesn't mean that he will be blessed by God when he goes about to do these things. James is saying that the wisest policy to say – If the wills. (In the Latin – Deo volente) The best course of action is, that when you make your plans, that you would take counsel with the Lord. First of all, according to His written word, you would check the Bible, to see if your actions are in line with Biblical principles. And second, you will commit the matter in prayer to Him. You do this so that He can speak to your heart, and give you peace in your mind that He approves of what you are doing.

This may take a little time. I think that the temptation for most of us is to think that God always approves of every purpose we have and every plan that we make. Sometimes we do not take into consideration that God has plans for our life, and we may need to wait upon Him and think about those plans in depth, committing every aspect of them that we know about to Him, so that we might have His blessing. Why? Because He is the only one who can providentially order what is best for us in regard to our life. James says here, that life is short; it is even a vapor. And as He is the One who orders all things after the counsel of His will, He would have you to pray and to think, and to wait upon Him for the answers to what you should do in the future.

If you do not think that you need to do things in this way, James is saying that you are boasting in your arrogance, and all such boasting is evil. If you know that this is the good way to go about these things of making decisions about what you are going to do in the future, and you don't do it God's way, you may run into difficulties that are hard for you to face. If you go ahead to make your plans, and proceed on without seeking Him and without asking for His blessing, it will be a sin for you to do this thing, and leave Him out of your plans. Turn with me over to Proverbs chapter 16, verses 1 and 2, and you will understand this matter of making plans a little better. "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits."

Ah, that is very helpful, is it not? All the plans and preparation that we make belong to us, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. That is, we are certainly free to make our plans. This belongs to us, and it is for us to do so. But the answer that we give to others, based upon what we have planned to do, it will ultimately come from the Lord, the Sovereign God; the One who made us, and sees all the motives of our heart for what we want to do. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. He can justify what he wants to do, pretty well, he thinks. But the Lord is the One who weighs the spirits; that is, the reasons and the motives for what you want to do or accomplish.

He knows all that is in your heart, and is able to weigh it perfectly, as to whether it is right and good or wise and the right way to proceed. And so, in verse 3 Solomon goes on to say that if you will roll them onto Him, even as a man rolls to another man a burden which is too heavy for himself, asking Him for help, then all of those things that you want to do and accomplish in this matter will be established. Now look down at verse 9. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Here, once again, we see a man planning things that he is going to do, but if he is a wise man, he knows that the Lord alone can direct his steps into the paths of right thoughts, speech, and actions.

How does He do this? How does He communicate what you should do to your heart? Well, He does so when you pray to Him and look to Him humbly in faith for the answer. Turn with me over to Psalm 10, verse 17. "Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more." Now, the principle of truth that is given to us here, its application goes wider than to just the fatherless and the oppressed, when they pray

about those who oppress them. It reaches to all of us as Christians, that if we are humble in thinking through the plans that we would like to see established in our life, and we pray offering up our desires for things agreeable to His will, then He will prepare our heart by giving the wisdom that we need and the assurance that He will act to help us with whatever is a concern to us.

Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, and that after that, he would also go to see Rome. He did not do this for a vacation, but that he might preach the gospel and bear witness to Christ there, also. He was planning these things, mentioning them in his heart and mind in the presence of the Spirit, to win his approval and so that He would put a stamp on his plans. Let me ask you now, whether this is what you do, dear Christian? If it is, you can be assured that God will direct your steps. He will show you the way that you should go. Jeremiah 10: 23 – “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

2nd – I want to show you that Demetrius purposed to do what he did by reasoning in the flesh.

Verse 23-27 say – “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.” “For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.” “He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.’ “Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.” “So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.”

The “great commotion” that arose at that time was about the supposed problem with the Way; that is, with the Christ whom Paul preached, and the religion of worshiping God according to His word through the apostles; Paul being the chief promoter of this new religion. This new religion was a take off on Judaism; the worship of one God, Demetrius knew, not many gods. And certainly not Diana of the Ephesians. And so Demetrius, a man who earned his whole livelihood by making silver shrines of Diana, was in danger, of losing his whole business. This appears to be a fair conclusion. He was a logical thinker.

It appears that there was almost a kind of labor union there in Ephesus, of those people who had any business promoting the worship of this false goddess Diana. For Demetrius called them together and plainly told them: Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turn away many people, saying that these are not really gods which are made by men’s hands. He then went on to tell them that this trade of theirs was in danger of falling into disrepute. Also a right conclusion. But he then went even further and told them that even the temple of the great goddess Diana might come to be despised and her magnificence as a goddess destroyed, the one who all Asia and the world worshiped. What a statement that was!

But this is purely fleshly thinking and reasoning. People who do not God, we should understand, think, walk, and live, according to the flesh. Their highest concern is selfish. It is their worldly interest and livelihood in business which occupies them more than anything, generally speaking. Self is the leading and governing principle in a natural man like Demetrius. A person thinking according to their flesh and walking according to their flesh, may be religious, but their religion often puts money and the things that money can bring, above every other consideration. The worship of this false goddess was a very lavish kind of worship. She was worshiped by means of these humanly beautiful shrines; the work of Demetrius’ hands.

If people turned to Christ and this new Way, then Demetrius knew that he would lose his wealth. And so he pretends to set forth the dire consequences if Diana's reputation was deposed. She might be despised and her magnificence destroyed; this one whom all Asia and the world worshiped, he asserted to them. It is amazing how zeal for false religion can lead men to a zealous defense of what is false if it will serve their own personal interests. A religion can be invented by men, and visual statues and images of it may indeed satisfy a carnal fleshly heart and mind in worship. And the Devil likes to promote false worship on a great level in any society and through any false god that the people may invent for themselves.

He also knows that Christians will be persecuted if he, through a man like Demetrius, can convince them that the one who is preaching Christ and those who were supporting him in the work, should be a target for their wrath. In this he succeeded. It says in verse 28 that when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' So Demetrius won them over to his false cause by his fleshly reasoning. The worship of Diana was lifted up in the eyes of the people because of its fleshly pomp. And there were great numbers of people who worshiped her, not only in Ephesus, but also in all Asia. One of the greatest works of the flesh is idolatry, even as it is stated to be so in Galatians 5: 20.

Knowing the greatness of the opposition that we shall receive if we call false religion idolatrous, if people are worshiping images and statues, let us not ever be afraid of telling them that this is wrong. Whatever the Lord leads us into, because we have taken our stand for the truth, that there is only one God, and that He is Spirit, invisible, eternal and unchangeable, and He is not to be worshiped according to the work of men's hands; let us not fear. For God is the One who is leading us, and He will bring us through the trial of consequences and give us grace and wisdom and strength to face the opposition. This was how Paul and the disciples with him, thought. Let us not be afraid to assert the truth of the 1st and 2nd commands of the 10 commandments, even if it brings conviction of sin to people around us, and even if we are persecuted for it.

3rd – I want you to see how the whole city was thrown into rage and confusion because they didn't reason at all.

Verse 29 says – "So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's traveling companions." "And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him." "Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater." "Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together." "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward." "And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people." "But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'"

You can see here how gullible the masses were in that day, that they would believe the lie of Diana being a real goddess to be worshipped, when everything concerning her was made up by men. Let us always pray and seek to speak to people about God being the true and living God, and the Lord Jesus being His Son. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, then gentle, then reasonable. But these people were not reasonable at all. Let us always believe that Christ by His Spirit can so work that men can change from being unreasonable to reasonable by Christ's grace. Let them know that it is possible to know God through simple faith in Christ and what He has done in His life, death, and resurrection.

Let us remember that Christ is with us always, even unto the end of the age. His Spirit and His life in our heart, so that we might let our light shine before men. Let us also remember that God the Holy Spirit led Paul and Gaius and Aristarchus into this situation of difficulty, so that their witness to the truth would become all the stronger. Greater is He who is in us than he who

is in the world. We shall overcome even in the midst of the most difficult situations because He is with us.

4th – I want to show you how it was, that the city clerk used the voice of reason to restore order to the city.

Verse 35 – “And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: ‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?’ “Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.” “For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.” “Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls.” “Let them bring charges against one another.” “But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.” “For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.” “And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.”

This city clerk may not have known the Lord, but he did know how to reason correctly about this situation. Let us always remember that it is God who gives natural gifts to men, as well as spiritual gifts through Christ. It is good to remember that God can, and sometimes does, use men in positions of government, men who do not know Him, but whom He knows that He can use to afford safety, protection, and justice under the law, to Christians who are being troubled by the wicked. Let us rejoice that it is so!

The world will always be a better place if people know how to reason, how to use good common sense and observational logic to promote peace and a right course of action through the courts. This man knew how to do this. And he was a blessing to the apostle Paul and his traveling companions. They were exonerated from any fault in this matter, and Demetrius and his crew were reprovved. The word of the Lord would continue to grow mightily and multiply. We should be thankful that God is sovereignly watching over his people, even in the most difficult situations that they face.