

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 20

Paul's Third Missionary Journey and the Background for the Corinthian Correspondence

At some point later in Paul's life, years beyond the time where we are now studying, Paul will write the Philippian church, "Do not be anxious ["worried"] about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). Do you ever wonder how Paul came to write that? Certainly it is easy and right on one level to answer, "through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!" But beyond that, were these words that also came out of the personal experience of Paul? Did God work through Paul's life to help him experience that about which he would later write?

I believe, through absolutely *zero* scientific studies but simply by personal observation, that everyone has some personal level of "worrying" they do in life. Some people are going to spend 10 percent of their personal energy worrying, if not about one thing, then about another. It is as if you made a list of ten areas that one might worry over. Although the person might tell you they only worry about the first three areas, if you could magically snap your fingers and make those three disappear, you would find that they just move on and worry about the next three on the list.

Often worry is more about a person's outlook, than it is the subject matter one worries over. Which brings us back to Paul's teaching, "be worried in nothing." Paul does not say that the subjects of worry are not worthy of concern. He just knows that the source of aid and help is from God above. Hence Paul writes that *instead* of worrying, we should pray about our concerns to God, ask for his help, and then thank him for what we know is forth coming. We then turn areas of concern and worry into faith building triumphs of God!

I return now to the early question, what do we see in Paul's life that taught, or at least reinforced this good life principle to him? I suspect today that we will get some insight into this as we continue Paul's third missionary journey and see the background behind his letters to the Corinthians.

PAUL IN EPHESUS (CONT'D)

If you find yourself in Albuquerque, New Mexico with an hour to kill, you might want to go to Northrop Hall on the University of New Mexico campus. Inside you will find the Meteorite Museum with its extensive collection of meteorites (rocks)

that have fallen from outer space. The highlight of the collection is a 2,000-pound rock that fell in Kansas in 1948.

Most everyone today knows what a meteorite is. We live in a day when man has traversed space, walked on the moon, and scanned with telescopes deep into the heavens. Have you considered, however, what a primitive people might think if they saw a rock come hurtling out of the sky? Especially if these eye witnesses believed that the sky was actually inhabited by gods.

We get insight into this from the famous Greek playwright Euripides (ca. 480 BC – 406 BC) who wrote a tragedy entitled *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. In the play the goddess Artemis rescues Iphigenia from a sacrificial death by substituting a deer on the altar and whisking the girl to Tauris (a Greek colony along the northern coast of the Black Sea). Iphigenia works as a priestess at the temple of Artemis where there was a “statue “which they say fell from the sky.” Later in the play, the “thing that fell from the sky” is stolen by Iphigenia’s brother and taken to Athens.¹

While to us that may seem absurd, to the mindset of ancient Greeks, it seems more sensible. Of course to Paul and those of Judaic Christian understanding, the idea was as absurd as it is to us. Jews knew about God from his revelation in Scripture and Christians knew from Scripture as well as God’s real descent to earth not as a rock, but as a man, Jesus Christ.

Which brings us back to Paul in Ephesus. Paul had spent over two years in Ephesus teaching daily and seeing the church grow. Somewhere during that time, Paul decided he should go back through Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica) and Achaia (Greece) visiting the churches. He then thought to go to Jerusalem followed by Rome. In anticipation of this, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on while he finished up in Ephesus.

During Paul’s last few days in Ephesus, “there arose no little disturbance” (Acts 19:23) concerning the Way (an early term for the church). The disturbance was instigated by a silversmith named Demetrius. Demetrius made his living forming shrines to Artemis out of silver.² Now the Artemis of Ephesus was not the same as the Artemis of Tauris; but the two did have an element in common. The Artemis

¹ *Iphigenia among the Taurians* Loeb Classical Library (1999) translation by David Kovacs, at lines 86 and 1384.

² The Artemis of Ephesus was not the same Artemis as the one of Tauris.

worshipped in Ephesus was based on a “stone that fell from the sky” (Acts 19:35). The Ephesians had built, almost 600 years earlier, a massive temple to Artemis.³

The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Antipater of Sidon, writing in the first century BC spoke of the Temple compared to the other wonders of the ancient world:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; *but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, ‘Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.’*⁴

The temple was huge; four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens.⁵ It was a huge economic driver for Ephesus. It served as a tourist destination, a site of religious pilgrimage, and even a bank. People from throughout Asia Minor would use the temple as a place to keep their money and treasures. Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40 – 120), a young man in nearby Bithynia at the time, would later write,

“about the Ephesians ... that large sums of money ... belonging to private citizens and deposited in the temple of Artemis, not alone money of the Ephesians but also of aliens and of persons from all parts of the world, and in some cases of commonwealths and kings, money which all deposit there in order that it might be safe, since no one has dared to violate that place.”⁶

Apart from its tourist pull, its religious draw, and its banking position, the temple also served as a source of income to those like Demetrius who would fashion replicas of the goddess Artemis or shrines in her honor.

It comes as no surprise that Demetrius was able to stir up quite a commotion when he accused Paul of convincing people not only in Ephesus “but in almost all of Asia” that “gods made with hands are no gods” (Acts 19:26). A number rallied around Demetrius as he pointed out that “from this business we have our wealth” (Acts 19:25). A final pointed message was his declaration that “there is a danger

³ The original temple was built around 550 BC. It was subsequently rebuilt several times including by Alexander the Great.

⁴ Loeb Classical Library, *The Greek Anthology Book IX* (Harvard University Press 1919) translated by W. R. Paton at 58 (pg 31).

⁵ Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Eerdmans 2004) at 20.

⁶ Dio Chrysostom, Discourse 31.54, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press 1940) translated by J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby.

not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute 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” (Acts 19:27).

When we consider the extra-biblical insight into Ephesus and the cult of Artemis, it comes as no surprise that when Demetrius issues the fearful concern, the people “were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28). In fact, Luke tells us, soon the whole city was in an uproar.

Paul had with him two companions from Macedonia, Gaius and Aristarchus, who were grabbed and hauled into the theater. We consider a theater today as a place for drama or an occasional concert. While the theater held such events in Paul’s day, it was used in many more ways. The Ephesian theater would seat 20,000 people and was used for large meetings, public events, meetings of governmental assemblies, holiday festivities, etc.⁷ It was a logical place to haul Paul’s co-workers.

Paul sought to intervene and appear before the crowd, but his friends, including some provincial officials, begged Paul not to go into the theater. So Gaius and Aristarchus stood in the theater without Paul, but with God! Jews were involved in the ruckus and grabbed one of Paul’s other companions caught up in the riot and shoved him (Alexander) to the front of the theater. Alexander tried to quiet the crowd and present a defense, but the crowd soon recognized him as a Jew and began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:34).

The Greek being chanted by the people was an actual slogan in use at the time. The Greek phrase begins with *megale* (μεγάλη) translated “Great.” The phrase is found in inscriptions in ancient Ephesus as well as in a number of classical writers of the day.⁸

This chanting continued for about two hours! At that point the city clerk managed to get the crowd quiet by using a good bit of logic! First the clerk acknowledged that everyone knows Ephesus is the home of the temple and guardian of the image “which fell from heaven” (Acts 19:35). The clerk then said that everyone should just “be quiet and not do anything rash” (Acts 19:36). In fact, the Christians had not stolen anything or done anything illegal. So the proper action by Demetrius and others was not to riot and potentially get into trouble with the Roman authorities. Instead, the Clerk stated, they should take any of their grievances to court.

⁷ Trebilco at 349.

⁸ *Ibid.* at 318-319.

This fact related by Luke also comports well with our knowledge of Ephesus. Ephesus was a center for the Roman courts in the region. The proconsuls would hear grievances and make decisions on matters relevant to the city and its administration.

The clerk effectively ended the riot, dismissing the crowd. Paul saw this as his time to finally leave Ephesus. Paul called together disciples and said his good-byes. He then set out for Macedonia (Acts 20:1).

PAUL AND THE CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

One area of biblical study that challenges scholars is putting together a chronology of Paul's life that integrates the Acts narrative with the information we have from Paul's letters. We learn a good bit about Paul's travels and the issues in his life by examining his letters to the Corinthians, written while Paul was in Ephesus and then a bit later on. From these letters we put together a story that lets us know Paul had great concerns for the Corinthian church and was struggling to help it every way he could first from a distance, then through emissaries, through letters, and finally from another face-to-face-visit. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 we learn that before Paul wrote our letter of 1 Corinthians, he had already written to the Corinthians. There were problems in Corinth that drove Paul's concerns. While Luke told us about Paul sending Timothy into Macedonia, Paul lets us know he was sending Timothy past Macedonia into Corinth. Paul paved the way for Timothy telling the church,

“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers” (1 Cor. 16:10-11).

So while Paul had great concerns for the Corinthians, he was waiting to see them until he finished in Ephesus, writing,

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:5-9).

Paul ultimately went into Corinth, likely on his way to Macedonia, but the visit was very painful. So painful that when Paul recounted it in the letter we call 2 Corinthians where he wrote,

“For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. ... For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (2 Cor. 2:1, 4).

So rather than make another painful visit, Paul sent a tearful letter to Corinth sending it with Titus. Paul then struggles through with his Corinthian pain while searching for Titus so he may hear how the Corinthians responded. During this time Paul writes, “When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother [Titus] there (2 Cor. 2:12-13).

Here is Paul, disconcerted, in pain and with his spirit “not at rest” until he finally finds Titus who has encouraging news! Paul then writes yet another letter to the Corinthians. This is the letter we call 2 Corinthians.

Over the next few weeks, we will spend time covering Paul’s two Corinthian letters that we still have today. We urge you to try and read through each one in preparation.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “My spirit was not at rest” (2 Cor. 2:12).

Let us return to where we introduced this class. Often people confuse the inerrancy of Scripture with inerrancy of the apostles. Paul was not Jesus. He was not perfect. He struggled; he failed. Paul also grew as he progressed in age. His life was one where God was teaching him even as Paul was writing inspired letters to the churches. It is humbling to realize that Paul went through times of worry and concern. It was not just the unbelievers who caused Paul heartache, but his Christian family did also.

This is the Paul that gives us the inspired yet still experienced advice to take worries and give them in prayer to God. We might suggest that each one of us take a moment and write down exactly what we are worried about in life. Then take a time out from the world and find a quiet place of solitude. Alone with God, through the power of Jesus’ name (who Jesus is and what he has done), let us then set our worries before God. As we do so, let us thank him in faith for walking with us through whatever life has in store. We should also in faith walk holy in accordance with his will and see his hand work through us and our life.

2. “There is danger the great temple of Artemis may be counted as nothing” (Acts 19:27).

In a strange way, Demetrius was right. Ultimately Ephesus became a principal and leading Christian city. Once Christianity became the official religion of the

Roman Empire, Ephesus became home to at least one major church council. Moreover, the temple itself was ultimately destroyed and in the 530's the huge columns were used by Justinian to build the Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople, the largest and most spectacular church for 1,000 years of church history.

Let us remember that our faith in a risen Savior, in a God who created the world and is beyond any idol we might create on our own, is a faith that is in conflict with the values of the world. The world stands opposed to true biblical faith. While the temptation might be to compromise what we believe, or even mesh it into the world's systems and beliefs, we should never be so foolish. We are to be "the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste ... it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Mt. 5:13). Rather than lose our saltiness, let us be a "light of the world ... on a stand ... giv[ing] light to all in the house" (Mt. 5:14-15).

3. "I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8-9).

Once again we should take this time to remember and pray for those in the foreign mission fields. It takes a special courage and a special faith to take God's mission message into this lost world. Yet even a quick review of the news shows the world in desperate need of the gospel. May we see that "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38).