

*The Riot in Ephesus*

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“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!”

28 At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” 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. 30 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.

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. 33 The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander forward and told him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. 34 But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

35 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.

38 “If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the officials can hear the case at once. Let them make formal charges. 39 And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. 40 I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won’t know what to say.” 41 Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

*Acts 19:23-41 (NLT)*

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\* As discussed in Riverside’s HGLT (Home Group Leader Training), these guides are to be starting points for home group leaders to develop their own guides and approaches to leading group discussions. This is a resource tool, not a rigid “go through this guide word-for-word.” There are intentionally too many questions for a single home group time. This guides rely heavily on a few other study guides; including: Serendipity NT for Groups by the Young Life ministry (ISBN is N/A), “Acts: Seeing God’s Power in Action” by Phyllis LePeau (ISBN 9780830830077), “Acts: Seeing the Spirit Work” by John Stott (ISBN 0851113907), “Acts” by N.T.Wright (ISBN 9780830821853), “Acts” by NavPress (ISBN 0891091122), “Acts” by Blackaby (ISBN 9781418526429), “Acts: The Spread of the Gospel” by John MacArthur (ISBN 9781418508746), “Book of Acts” by Max Lucado (ISBN 0849953006).

**Observation** (what does the text say?) **Interpretation** (what does it mean?) **Application** (what does it mean to me/us?)

**Discussion/Topic Starters** (Ice Breakers)

- When you think of IDOL WORSHIP, what comes to mind?
- O: What things in the text strike you or jump out at you? Why?

**v.23-41**

O: What was the cause of the riot in Ephesus and how was it settled? (19:23-41)?

O: Why do the silversmiths see Paul and his message as a threat?

Follow-up: Does the gospel present a similar threat today? How?

I: How do people you know attempt to gain health, love, money, success and security?

Follow-up: Do economic interests set any group against the gospel today?

Follow-up: What did you think about Ryan's list of potential idolatry today?

Note: Remember, most idols are GOOD things that have become GOD things. Ryan's Definition:

**An idol is** anything that can take the place of God as our Lord (that is, being #1 in our life) or as our Savior (that is, where we look for salvation and hope).

**personal idols:** money, image, beauty (you or your partner), possessions, pleasure, romance, relationships (e.g., spouse or children), career, accomplishment, skill

**cultural idols:** consumerism, individualism, family, human reason, science, nationalism, politics, political or social cause

**religious idols:** truth/doctrine, morality, spiritual gifts, ministry accomplishments

A: How is this episode from 2,000 years ago relevant in your life?

Follow-up: Your idols.... what are they? How have they gripped you?

A: How does this story in Ephesus challenge you to become a more effective proclaimer of the gospel?

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Good morning! My name is Ryan and I'm one of a number of leaders here at Riverside. Keith took a much-needed vacation this week so you get me this morning.

I want to begin by telling you about THE most important and popular places of worship in America today.<sup>1</sup> These religious sites are surrounded by vast seas of parking to accommodate millions of daily visitors. They are typically located near highways at the suburban edges of cities for ready access by pilgrims traveling long distances by car from a wide geographic area including diverse populations. Worshippers converge upon a building that appears as an island oasis within the sea of parking.

This building rises above the surroundings with a sparkling array of glass and concrete, and provides a sanctuary from driving, traffic, work, and other sources of stress. The architecture takes on a familiar form for a place of worship and is decorated with many familiar symbols of worship on signs, banners, flags, and images. These familiarities are not surprising as each site is part of a catholic, and by that I mean global, network of religious communities. Signs and directories allows visitors to easily identify the various sanctuaries, temples, chapels, and fellowship halls within the massive building. Each space invites visitors to take part in different spiritual practices and services. Many worshippers move with a great sense of achieved familiarity through rituals of worship formed by years of weekly repetition. The most faithful may even worship here daily. Worship spaces within the building are intentionally closed off from the outside world and connected by wandering hallways which invite visitors to slow down and contemplate their spiritual state. Indeed, time seems to stand still within this place, if not for a liturgical calendar of annual religious holidays and festivals. Each holiday or festival is reflected in a different set colors, images and symbols of worship. New festivals are often added to the calendar and advertised in order to attract additional seekers searching for meaning.

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Many of the chapels within the building are devoted to various saints and each displays its own array of religious icons (that is, examples of holy people), as well as sacraments and artifacts, which inspire worship and imitation. The promise of salvation is offered to all who would model their lives after these icons, taking the sacraments into their own life to become more like the saints. These icons or saints are recognized almost universally, especially as they appear in various forms of media including magazines, television and the internet. This evangelism occurs through sharing a gospel message that attracts new followers by an invitation to share in the good life offered by this religion and billions of its followers around the world. The unity and reach of this religion suggest that it is the most powerful religion in the world today.

## **<2> mall photos**

Last, my description of this religion would not be complete if I did not share a little more about the worship experience within its temples and chapels. Each fully engages the senses, inviting the worshipper to listen, taste, smell, touch, and see. You may be greeted by a pastor who offers to guide you through the experience or let you explore on your own terms. Visitors often enter cautiously, tentatively, but curiously, aware of their sense of need but unsure how it will be fulfilled. The most heightened worship experiences occur when the spirit leads worshippers to discover surprising and unanticipated experiences. Therefore, we keep returning expectantly, seeking that unexpected holy treasure that will provide fulfillment amongst the endless myriad of racks and shelves. At other times, worship is more intentional and planned; we arrive knowing exactly why we've come and find exactly what we need. In either case, after having found the holy treasure we came for, we conclude our worship experience by proceeding to the altar where pastors offer the tangible sacrament to us and invite us to make a sacrificial offering. And so we finally leave with the benediction of the pastor, having received a tangible sacrament, having sacrificially offered our money to sustain the religious enterprise, and knowing that we will soon return because we are gaining more and more of the tangible realities of the good life offered here. **<pause>**

By now you no doubt recognize that I was never talking about a megachurch, or anything we typically consider to be religious, but rather the shopping mall or a strip mall and the religion of consumerism. A full appreciation of the intentional parallels that were drawn to show that the shopping mall is really a place of worship may require that you listen to this again once online. You see, when something is so familiar to us, like a shopping mall, we can be blind to the spiritual aspects of what is really going on there. **<point to photos>** Here is a photo of a local religious site, shining its light as a beacon of hope for weary souls. Worshippers are lined up outside one of the many temples inside waiting for a pastor to offer the sacrament they came for. This young lady is one of many icons, or saints, showing you that inner peace and joy can be found in acquiring a discounted handbag and scarf. The Easter bunny photo time is just one example of events placed on the liturgical calendar to attract worshippers.

So why is this important? Most Americans, and most of us I'm sure, do not think that pagan or mythological religions are prominent in our culture today. We think of idol worship as something practiced by more primitive cultures in ancient history or in other third-world countries. But if our passage in Acts today is to have any meaning for us, we have to recognize that this is not true. The point of the introduction I shared was to show that this is not true. Consumerism is the largest religion in the world and is headquartered right here in America. Consumerism is a mythological religion because it promises salvation and happiness to any individual who keeps up with the latest fashions **<point>**, décor, gadgets **<point>**, fads, and events **<point>**. Even more deceptively, consumerism promises salvation and prosperity to any community or nation of people who will collectively embrace the practice of consuming its goods and services at ever higher levels for the good of the economy.

### **<3> Acts**

With this in mind, please open your Bible to Acts 19.23 for our passage today. But while you're turning there...

Do you want even more proof for the influence of consumerism in our nation? It might be the one thing that both political parties agree on. The famous campaign slogan used by former democratic President Bill Clinton to emphasize what really mattered was, "It's the economy, stupid." After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, former republican President George Bush famously called Americans to action, imploring us to get out and do our business and go to Disney World, because the terrorists were threatening our freedom to shop. OK, let's get into Acts before I'm accused of being anti-American for calling out one of our national religions just several days before the 4th of July!

As most of you know, we've been following the growth of Christianity and the early church as recorded by a first century physician named Luke in a historical record called the Acts of the Apostles. Today we'll begin in verse 23 of chapter 19...

#### **<4> Acts 19.23-24**

23 About that time... OK let's pause already. What is "that time"?

#### **<5> Map of Paul's 2nd journey**

In Chapter 18, the apostle Paul concluded his 2nd missionary journey by traveling from Corinth to Ephesus. **<point>** He had met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth and developed such a strong relationship and partnership with them, both in ministry and in their vocation as tentmakers, that they went with him to Ephesus. Paul left Ephesus for Jerusalem to fulfill a vow he had made and meanwhile Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus and literally started the church in that city out of their home. That's why we like to think of our home groups as kingdom outposts in our community.

#### **<6> Map of Paul's 3rd journey**

After Paul finished his business in Jerusalem, he went to Antioch **<point>**, which was essentially his home church, the church that originally sent him out as a missionary, and from there he began his 3rd missionary journey. Ch. 18 ends with Paul traveling

through cities in Galatia and Phrygia where he visited churches he had previously planted. In Ch. 19, he arrives back at Ephesus and spends two years teaching the believers in a public lecture hall DAILY. Two years was an unusually long time for Paul to spend in one place, so God must have been doing something powerful there. But...

### <7> Acts 19.23-24

23 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.

### <8> Artemis

So who is Artemis? Artemis was a goddess in greek mythology. She was a goddess of the hunt and of fertility, including both procreation and harvest from the soil. Ancient artifacts depicted her as shown on the screen. Now if you think about what would drive an economy at this time, she was really the goddess of money, business, and consumerism. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People traveled from all over the world to see it. Worship at the temple included the possibility of X-rated practices which I'm not going to go into this morning since we have grade schoolers in the room. And as we see in our passage, the selling of idols and shrines was a HUGE business.

Kids think about these idols like star wars or legos action figures, or Barbie dolls or my little ponies. You see one on TV or at your friends house and you want one too. You think you've GOT to have one, so you convince your parents to make a special trip to a special store just to get one! We'll take a look at the idols we adults have later.

Ephesus was a great trade center in Asia Minor and at this time the local economy was largely centered on the Temple of Artemis. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to compare the Temple of Artemis and Ephesus to Disney World and Orlando. Seriously

In our world today Demetrius would be a multi-millionaire businessman with a factory producing idols or Mickey Mouse action figures and his own store in a shopping mall next to Disney World.

### <9> Acts 19.25-26

25 [Demetrius] called [the craftsman] 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!

The business model for Demetrius and many others in Ephesus was based on making and selling goods that people thought they needed, even though they really didn’t. Folks, we’ve got to recognize that the times have not changed. Have you ever seen anything for sale in the shopping mall that you don’t really need? Have you ever been convinced that you needed something you really didn’t need?

But notice when the gospel was presented the idols of the culture were exposed. The idol business took a hit because people were meeting Jesus. Paul’s presentation of the gospel clearly wasn’t that you can have Jesus and keep your idols too. A choice had to be made. Paul confronted the idols of culture when sharing the gospel. Following Jesus meant getting rid of the idols.

Folks, we really need to take a hard look at this. You see, we get frustrated because we think our culture keeps getting more and more immoral and so then we try to work through government and laws to make people behave more morally. Meanwhile, our churches are full of people who don’t live any differently from the immoral culture around us because WE don’t confront the idols of our culture! And I think that one of the major reasons this happens is that we don’t even realize what our idols are! We are blind to them!



So what are our idols? An idol is not just a stone or wood statue. It's naïve to think we don't have idols today just because we may not have statues or shrines in our home. Oh, but wait, we do! Our shrines are entertainment centers or closets full of the hottest summer fashions. And as we discussed earlier, the idolatry of Artemis wasn't really about a statue but the idols of consumerism and money.

### <10> Idol Definition

Let's define what an idol is. An idol is anything that can take the place of God as our Lord (that is, being #1 in our life) or as our Savior (that is, where we look for salvation and hope). Put differently, an idol is anything you think you can't live without or anything that gives you a sense of value or meaning instead of God. The most obvious evidence that we have idols comes in our response when we lose our idols. Its also important to note that most idols are not inherently bad things. For example, there's nothing inherently wrong with a shopping mall or the convenience of an abundance of goods and services available for us to buy. Idols are usually good things made into an ultimate thing. This makes them deceptive. But let's be clear about this: every person has idols and every city and culture has idols. Almost anything can be an idol - any person, object or idea - but let's identify some common idols in our culture.

### <11> Our Idols

We have personal idols, including, money, image, including the beauty of you or your partner, possessions, pleasure, romance, relationships (e.g., your spouse or children), career, accomplishment, and skill, among others. Many are no doubt closely related, but let me elaborate a little on each.

Money: Can you be consumed by a desire to have more money? Can you become consumed by acquiring more money? Note that money can be an idol for you whether you are rich, poor, or middle class.

Image: Do you find your meaning and value in a projecting a particular image? Of

course this can be the physical beauty of you or your partner, but image idolatry can also be your social status, fitness, intellect, or your identity as a stay-at-home mom or a working mom.

Your image can be closely related to your possessions, including a particular possession, accumulating possessions, and taking care of your possessions. God wants you to take care of your possessions, that's good stewardship, but when taking care of your possessions leaves no time for God, you're worshipping an idol.

Pleasures: Are you consumed by a desire for new and exciting pleasures? Of course, one aspect of this is obvious, especially for guys, but there's also seeking the next big adventure or thrill in other ways, too. Extreme sports is an entire industry built on this. Notice that while one gender generally leans toward the idol of pleasure, the other leans toward the idol of romance. Now I'm not trying to get us guys off the hook, but it's unquestionably true that due to an entire television and book industry, it can be very difficult for any guy to meet the romantic expectations set before him.

Relationships: Does your relationship with your spouse get priority over God? In a good marriage there's a temptation for idolatry. I don't want to be morbid, but I've heard it said that one or the other of every couple is guaranteed to one day see their spouse in a coffin. How will you respond and carry on if that person was your savior more than Jesus? How about your children? In the last decade, the idol of children has become more prominent than ever before. Are you finding your identity and meaning in the activities, accomplishments and skills of your children? Couples who worship the idols of money, beauty, pleasure, romance, or children, struggle and often call it quits when any of these are threatened or taken away.

Career/accomplishment/skill: Many of us in this room worship the idols of career, accomplishment, and skill. You may not know this, but child sacrifice is not just something that happened in pagan worship centuries ago. It happens all the time today. Many, and especially men, sacrifice their family in order to be successful in their career. I see this all the time in the University where I work and in the business world. It's a double lie both in the definition of success and the way to achieve it.

There's another subtle way accomplishment can be an idol. I was confronted with this just this week while preparing this sermon. <Story of storms and clean-up.>

How many of you have recognized one or more of your idols so far? **<show hands>**  
Folks, I haven't even talked about cultural and religious idols yet! I'm going to have to cover these very quickly. We've already talked a lot about consumerism, but what about individualism? Does God have any say at all over your own individual rights and wants? Cultural idols can clash. For example, the idol of individualism in our culture often clashes with Christians who aren't really worshipping God but the idol of family. Do we look for salvation in human reason and science before God? The notion that we live in a Christian nation leaves Christians particularly vulnerable to the idol of nationalism. Are you finding your identity in the one true God who rules all nations, or in one nation that's supposed to be UNDER that God? Any political or social cause can easily become an idol. There are so many good social causes that have become idols. <Tell story of the crazy woman on the cooking reality show.>

Last and far from least, the most deceptive and sinister idols of all might be religious idols. The evil one loves to trick Christians into worshipping gifts God has given us instead of God himself. From the Pharisees to the Puritans to modern Christians of all theological and moral persuasions, we so easily worship and devote ourselves to doctrines and morals instead of God. The danger is that when we become consumed by doctrines and moral codes, we no longer have a need to hear from God. Folks, believe it or not, even the Bible, or one's interpretation of it, can become an idol. We can also fall into worshipping particular spiritual gifts instead of the Giver of all gifts. As a common example, when pastors and congregations make preaching an idol, the pastor becomes consumed by preparing sermons rather than ministering to people, and the congregation becomes sermon critics rather than putting it into practice. That's one reason that we don't expect Keith to preach all the time. Pastors and church leaders are also particularly vulnerable to making ministry accomplishments more important than unconditional faithfulness to God.

So now that we've all been confronted with our idols its important that I remind you that the point of this exercise was not to make you feel guilty or to say "ooh, look at how bad we all are," but to identify our idols. I'd suggest that when you discuss this in home groups, talk openly about your idols. We all know we have them. My personal idol is accomplishment; my cultural idol is individualism; and my religious idol is truth/doctrine. So there. I did it and so can you. We have to recognize our idols, and expose them, before we can deal with them. That's what was happening in Ephesus and what led to radical cultural change. Demetrius, the silversmith, rightly recognized that this is what was happening. Demetrius continues in verse 27...

### <12> Acts 19.27-28

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

Demetrius also rightly observes that the gospel message and the Kingdom of God was not only threatening the idol of consumerism, but also their national identity. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" was their national chant. It wouldn't be unlike us shouting "U.S.A..." As I mentioned earlier, the idol of consumerism is always closely connected to the idol of nationalism. Demetrius says that Paul not only insulted Artemis but their national identity and economic prosperity. Few things stir up passions and boiling anger more than nationalism! When the pastor of a megachurch, a man for whom I hold a great deal of respect, preached a sermon series which confronted the idol of nationalism, he lost 1000 people from his congregation. So I'd better not do that today or we'll have negative-850 people here next week ;-)) or maybe even rioting...

### <13> Acts 19.29-32

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. 30 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. 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.

I love that last line. That should be the definition a riot. A riot is when people are rioting that don't even know why they're rioting! Seriously though, don't forget what caused all this. Personal and cultural idols were confronted and exposed. As Keith has pointed out numerous times in Acts, proclamation of the gospel is always followed by opposition. If we face no opposition, we have to ask ourselves whether or not we are really sharing the gospel.

#### <14> Acts 19.33-36

33 The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander forward and told him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. 34 But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 35 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."

The mayor is referring to a meteorite that fell from the sky and supposedly looked like Artemis. Interestingly, he's appealing to their nationalism to calm them down.

#### <15> Acts 19.37-41

37 “You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess. 38 If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the officials can hear the case at once. Let them make formal charges. 39 And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. 40 I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won’t know what to say.” 41 Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

End of story. To summarize, in this story and throughout the book of Acts, we’ve seen the radical transformation of lives and cities as the gospel message was proclaimed and the Kingdom of God spread. In this passage, the silversmith Demetrius, revealed that a major reason driving that radical transformation, was that the idols of culture were confronted. I spent a significant amount of time describing a number of idols in our culture because in order to deal with them we have to first recognize them and expose them. Now, once we recognize and expose our idols, its time to destroy them.

### **<16> Idol Definition**

So how do you destroy idols? Well, if your idols are possessions, you could certainly physically destroy them, but if your idols are people, its best not to destroy the person but their place in your life. Remember from our definition that an idol is anything that takes the rightful place of God as being our only Lord and Savior. Through the prophet Hosea, God described the idol worship of the Israelites as spiritual adultery. Thinka about that. When we worship our idols, we too are adulterers. We are unfaithful to God as our Lord. Under the Law of Moses, the punishment for adultery was death, but through the prophet Hosea, God indicated that even though he could justifiably kill off his people, because of his great love he still wanted reconciliation. So God promised to send his Son Jesus to reconcile idol worshippers like you and me back to him. Jesus

every week by taking the elements of communion that represent Jesus blood and his body. The communion table will be open as Benji and the band lead us in worship. We'll also have leaders available to pray with you in the back.

Now here's the most important thing I've had to say all morning. If Jesus died the death we deserve for our unfaithfulness to God, the only way to destroy your idols is to confess them to God, trust in Jesus alone as your Savior, and make him Lord of your life. If you've never done that before, there's no better time than now. I also believe that some of us have been worshipping idols that we didn't even know we were worshipping. If that's you, and even if you've been a Christian for many years, humbly confess your idols to God and ask Jesus to be Lord over them. Finally, all of us need to be ready to respond as the Spirit guides us because confronting idols will result in radical personal and cultural transformation.