

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With Compassion for People’s Spiritual Condition

Acts 19:23-41 (Part 2)

23 About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. 24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; 25 these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. 26 "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. 27 "Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence." 28 When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. 30 And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. 31 Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. 32 So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. 33 Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. 34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 35 After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven? 36 "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. 37 "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. 38 "So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. 39 "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. 40 "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering." 41 After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

Last week we began looking at this text and seeking to see from it just some of the reasons why people resist Jesus. How is it that two people can hear the same message of salvation, consider the same evidence of who Jesus is and have one receive and believe while the other balks and rejects? Let me remind you of something John the apostle said referring to Jesus in John 3:19-21;

19 This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Please note this carefully with me as what John was telling us is this; *since Jesus is God's sole standard of what true goodness is about, then the test of our own goodness, or lack of it, is*

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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whether or not we living in a right relationship, according to the standard of our risen and living Savior. But, you and I have a problem. For if we compare ourselves with the perfect goodness revealed in the life of Jesus, all of God's goodness in the flesh, we all come way short of the standard. As Romans 3:23 declares, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”** Beloved, it does not matter at all whether we are big sinners or little sinners - we are all sinners! And we do not enjoy having our sins exposed which mean that as sinners, we keep Jesus as far away from us as we can. The only way to have the sin problem corrected is to have our sins exposed. I do not mean exposed for all the world to see; but exposed to ourselves before God. *The issue for the unbeliever is not an intellectual problem, it is a moral problem.*

As we began to note last week and will see again this week, the reason why some people resist the truth about Jesus as the Savior from their sins is because there is a heartache that comes from learning that we are great sinners and thus in need of a great Savior. So many spend their lives running from this knowledge of themselves, becoming experts in dodging, avoiding, hiding, pretending, covering, running, protecting, eluding, escaping, averting, evading their real selves. And it is this practice of escaping the knowledge of our real selves that most people have chosen to live their lives because they have come to believe the lie that it is the way of less pain. Which may be true in the short run, but in light of spending eternity in the bliss of heaven or the bellows of hell, it is something that we must confront people with; the truth of the gospel.

And this is why the “good news” of the Gospel, a gospel that does heal and brings delight is initially so painful. Our Lord Jesus desires to do more than forgive our sins; He desires to take hold of our real self, causing us to first see who we really are apart from Him; people full of sin, full of flaws and full of brokenness and then looking to Him as our only hope. Jesus desires for us to know who we created to be, those who know how to live life God's way. But it all begins when we stop running from and start looking to Jesus. This is what it means to be converted.

I. Problem #1: An Issue of the Heart

But again, some resist all of this and continue to run. And our text reveals to us two reasons why people resist the truth about Jesus. Last week, in verses 23-27, we saw that the first problem people have is one of the heart. One reason why people reject the truth of Christ is because they have a sick heart that loves anything other than God and His ways. God states it clearly in Jeremiah 17:9,

The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

For the Ephesians, as revealed in the heart of Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, we saw two potential idols that keep people from coming to Jesus. The first was the love of income as we saw in verses 23-25; their desire to be rich rather than repent and know Christ; and the second heart problem was one of identity in verses 26-27 where we saw their desire to be associated with Artemis and the worldly surroundings of Ephesus rather than with the people and truths of God. Both of these are potential idols that might cause us to reject or resist Christ; a love for money; a love for position or title. It could be a love for the things of this world, but the question that must be asked, what needs to be exposed is the condition of your heart. What do you love most?

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

And when we do share the gospel and we are met with resistance, the believer is not to lose heart but to seek to learn what it is that this person loves more than the knowledge of salvation and eternal life that comes from Jesus. This is why some resist Christ. But there is a second reason found in this text that we will look at next. It is not only an issue of the heart...

II. Problem #2: An Issue of the Hearing (28-41).

Franklin Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the United States, often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he whispered in his ear, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Without hesitation the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

Another condition of sinful humanity is this issue of hearing. To be sure, people's ears function, but they do not know how to listen. And it is this hearing problem that leads many to resist Christ because they refuse to listen to the Word of God, even when the eternal destiny of their soul is at stake. Our text reveals three realities regarding this problem of hearing.

The **first** reality is this; ***if you love your sin, you will not hear the truth***. The selfishness of sin is like a pair of headphones that are worn at all times playing only what you want to hear. With the headphones in, not only do you want to hear the truth of God's Word, you cannot hear the truth of God's word. This is what was happening in verses 28-31 in which we see two responses. The first response was that of **anger**. Read again with me in verses 28-29;

28 When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

Having heard the passionate discourse of Demetrius, the silversmiths began identifying themselves with Artemis, their goddess. Soon a mob gathered and rushed into the theater, which still exists today, and holds some 25,000 people. This was the largest public building in Ephesus. As the riot continued, the people soon dragged Gaius and Aristarchus into their midst. It would seem that the mob could not find Paul so they took hold of associates. Have you ever noticed how anger causes people to do strange things? What kind of things?

For one, *anger leaves no room for rational discussion*. Notice this in verses 30-31, ***30 And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. 31 Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.***

Can you imagine how much courage it took for Paul to be willing to face this riotous mob? I get afraid to talk to my neighbor across the street and here is Paul, ready to preach to an angry mob. Over in Acts 20:24, Paul gave this testimony saying, ***"But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."*** But sometimes there is a fine line between fearlessness and folly. While Paul wanted to address this problem

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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face-to-face, the disciples knew that the crowd would kill him or at least run him out. But all of this illustrates the fact that if you love your sin, you will not listen to the truth. You will fight it, resist it, undermine it, call it old-fashioned, bigoted, narrow-minded, hate-speech, unloving; any name in the book rather than rationally sit down and consider its truth. But there is another hearing problem; not only will loving your sins cause you to not listen to the truth...

Second, not listening to the truth means you are listening to lies. This was true of this riotous mob. Notice two things that happen as a result of this crowd not listening to the truth.

To begin with, there was confusion. We read in verse 32 of this result, ***So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.*** The people did not even know why they were there anymore, just brainlessly chanting and ranting. Benjamin Franklin once said that a mob is “a monster with heads enough, but no brains.” If one person not listening to the truth is dangerous, what do you have when a group of hostile people get together and do not listen? You have a ticking time bomb.

There was confusion, but the confusion grew into something else; utter anarchy. Notice with me verses 33-34 where we read, ***33 Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. 34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”***

It would seem that the Jews wanted to make sure that the Ephesians knew they had no part in Paul’s ministry. So they sent Alexander to the podium to make the point. But when the Ephesian crowd saw him, they went ballistic because they knew that the Jews, like Paul, condemned idol worship. So now the Ephesians would not listen to any reason at all and chaotically screamed, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Nothing else was heard for two hours straight. And yet these people did not even know why they were doing this, just listening to the lies of everyone around them, not listening to the truth. But it brings us to a third hearing problem; first if you love sin you will not listen to the truth; second, if you are not listening to the truth you are listening to lies; and...

Third, if you continue to listen to lies, your livelihood and possibly life are in danger. Even the pagan “town clerk” – this city official understood this truth. It was this more level headed Ephesian that stepped forward and quieted the crowd. This man was really like the mayor of the city and he made this speech beginning in verse 35 saying,

"Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven? 36 "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. 37 "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. 38 "So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. 39 "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. 40 "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering." 41 After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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I do not believe this man was a Christian, but I do believe that many unregenerate people understand this principle; that if you keep listening to lies, your livelihood and life are in danger. What kind of danger does it put people in? Two kinds, one seen by this town clerk and another that is revealed in the Scriptures.

First, the town clerk saw the immediate, temporal consequences. Remember that this town clerk was more like a modern day mayor. When Rome wanted to address a city, the correspondence came to him. The reason why this man acted was as much to save his own position, for if it was reported to Rome that he did not control the city, he could lose his title and privileges. The point is that even unbelievers, because of the common grace that God bestows upon humanity, can live in civility. Level headed people know that it is in their best interest to do so. According to Romans 13:4, government is God's servant, without which there would be total anarchy in this world. God used a pagan clerk to accomplish His purposes in Ephesus. Today, if He so chooses, God can use an unbelieving senator or a school board member, or a Supreme Court judge to approve things that are wholesome for society or even to overturn those things that are not all so that the gospel message may advance.

I would like you to take a close look at something this clerk said in verse 37, ***For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.*** This gives us some insight into Paul's method of reaching a community. Paul did not build the church by attacking the opponent. What did he do people? He preached the Word of God, knowing that its truth would take care of false religions and beliefs. And it did. How do I know this? Let me ask you; have you met any worshipers of Artemis recently? You'll look in vain to find even one follower of Artemis while there are millions worldwide who worship and would be willing to die for Jesus.

We need to get this lesson down clear, if we listen to lies there will be immediate consequences. Satan is in the business of promoting his lies. What are some of the lies out there that are clearly at odds with the Author of Life? How about "safe sex" – that is a lie apart from the divinely instituted covenant of marriage. How about "A woman has a right to do as she chooses with her body" is a lie. It is contrary to Scripture where the woman's body belongs to her husband and the husband's body belongs to his wife. How about "God approves of homosexuality – because love is love"? It is a lie that goes against all that God has taught from the book of Genesis through to the book of Revelation. It's no greater sin than any other listed in the Scriptures; but like all sins, it keeps us from a right relationship with God and thus is a lie. How about, "There is no such thing as absolute truth" – another lie and this would make Jesus the biggest liar of all for He said of Himself in John 14:6, ***"I am the way, they truth and the life..."*** Beloved, if you listen to these lies there will be consequences, spiritually, emotionally, and often physically. It is not my word, but what the Word of God teaches. But there is something worse than the temporal consequences...

There are also eternal consequences. Consider the words of Jesus who said in John 5:24:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Who is it that receives eternal life according to Jesus? Those who *hear* the Word and believe in the One who spoke it; these receive eternal life. The ears must be opened and ready to receive and act upon the gospel. Now, if we flip this around then, it is those who resist the Word

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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and the One who gave it, those who *refuse to hear* the only message of salvation that will experience everlasting death. They will not pass from death to life. Are there are eternal consequences for refusing to listen to the truth? Yes, indeed.

Let me recap as to the reasons why people resist Christ. It is because of a *heart problem*; their refusal to love Christ because they already love something else, whether it be income, identity, immorality, whatever; and it is because of a *hearing problem*—because they love their sin they refuse to listen to the truth and rather believe in lies, lies that will result in grave danger.

Let me tell you that I am not speaking of just a handful of people. This is the condition of every person from the birth, including you and me. Each of us is born with a heart problem and a hearing problem. Here is the good news; Jesus is the Great Physician specializes in renewing hearts and opening deaf ears. Let me ask you something, have you called upon Jesus as the Great Physician to perform spiritual surgery on your heart and ears? Some of you have never come to Him. It is time to humble yourself before Him today. Would you trust in Christ knowing that as you do He will open your heart and your ears? And some of you hear this morning need a follow up visit with Christ. Yes, you have trusted Him, but your life as of late has been a diet of feasting on the things of this world or the things of your flesh; things that harden the heart and hush the hearing. Do not let your heart be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, sin whose great lie is this, “I am okay just as I am.” No, you are not okay without Jesus and without a heart that fervently follows Jesus. Make sure you do not have a heart or hearing problem.

Now, these past two messages were entitled, “Resolved to Live: With Compassion for People’s Spiritual Condition.” As you share the life and message of Jesus with others, even as Paul did for two years there in Ephesus, you will face resistance; people will reject what you say and even at time ridicule what you say. How should you respond?

First, and I am not sure why we so quickly forget this; *do not be surprised at resistance.* Why should we be surprised that people with hearts hardened with sin-producing toxins and ears stuffed with truth deafening build up resist the gospel? Were we not ourselves once the very same way?

Second, *become a fervent prayer!* Pray for those who resist what you tell them about Jesus, asking the Lord to give you the words that He will use to open their hearts and ears.

Finally, *trust in a sovereign God to do what He alone can do.* There is not one of us in here that can save sinners. We who are obedient to Christ are simply tools through which God does His surgical work on the hearts and minds of those with whom we share the gospel.

If we would be resolved to live with compassion for people’s spiritual condition, it all begins when we first recognize and acknowledge that apart from Jesus we were sin dead in our sins, we were still spiritual dead.

We must be willing to have our sins exposed, in the light of God’s goodness revealed in Jesus. When we do this, two things happen. First, He forgives us. One of the terms used to describe this forgiveness in the New Testament is the word “justified.” It is a legal term that means we are acquitted of all the charges against us - accepted by God as if we had never sinned. We are, in the words of Romans 3:24, ***“being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”***

What did it cost Christ in order to offer us this forgiveness? His very life, by dying for us on the cross. He went to the cross to take upon Himself the judgment of God that we deserved because of our sin, rebellion, rejection and apathy toward our Creator. A constant theme running through the New Testament is captured in Romans 5:8, ***“But God demonstrates His own love***

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The riches God offers us in return are not only forgiveness, but reconciliation, the experience of His peace and love along with a certain future with Him in heaven.

Not only does God forgive us, but a second thing God does for us is the giving of His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. God the Holy Spirit literally takes up residence in our very lives. Is this true? Could this be? 1 Corinthians 6:19 declares, **“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”** God’s purpose is to transform us from the inside out in order to mold us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This does not happen overnight; it is a lifetime process that takes place as we learn to daily live in a relationship with Him. The promise is that one day God will, in the words of Jude 24, **“make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy...”** That is when our salvation will be complete. Beloved, the call of Jesus to come to Him as the Great Physician is not just an invitation to be on the right side or the winning team; it is an invitation to become the right person by His power to transform you. This is the gospel Paul preached in Ephesus. This is what turned Ephesus upside down. Lives that were made right by the righteous One, Jesus Christ. May our hearts and hearing be open to Him.

Soli Deo Gloria

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