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### The Incredible Journey #3

“The Artisan”

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

This is now our third week together in our sermon series “The Incredible Journey.” The book of Acts, part III. While the first two thirds of the book of Acts tell a wide range of stories about the apostles after Jesus’ resurrection and return to heaven, these final chapters focus primarily on the Apostle Paul and his missionary journeys. Last week we were in the ancient city of Corinth in chapter 18. By the end of the chapter, Paul has returned to Antioch, the starting point for all his missionary journeys. Home base, if you will. And now we begin his third and final missionary journey. He still has one last trip ahead, to Rome, but that will be as a prisoner and not as a traveling preacher. Here in chapter 19 we continue on Paul’s incredible journey.

#### Acts 19

While Apollos was in Corinth (we met Apollos last week in ch 18), Paul passed through the inland regions (see map) and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ They replied, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ <sup>3</sup>Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ <sup>4</sup>Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—<sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

The Holy Spirit. Third person of the Trinity. These guys had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. God, yes. Jesus, yes. Holy Spirit? Who’s that? Ever wondered that? We talked this week in our Session meeting (the monthly meeting of our elders) about who this Holy Spirit is. Many shook their heads and said, I’ve never really understood it. Don’t get it. Early church – it took about 300 years for them to wrestle over and start to articulate a theology of the HS. We still have a hard time getting our minds around it. We aren’t going to dive too deeply into it today, but let’s look at what Paul does and says here.

He says – the baptism of John, a baptism of repentance, is a starting point, for sure. Confession of sin and repentance – an effort of the will to turn away from sin and toward God – that is essential in becoming a Christ follower. But there’s more! It’s not just a bath with water to wash away the dirt. It’s a spiritual cleansing. And it’s getting out of the water and putting on a new set of clothes – the spirit of God in Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Jesus as a fully human embodiment of God cannot be in all places at once. But God’s Holy Spirit can. So breathe deeply and receive the Holy Spirit, Paul says. And they do.

8 He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

The Sons of Sceva

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. 13Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.' 14Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15But the evil spirit said to them in reply, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' 16Then the man with the evil spirit leapt on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. 17When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. 18Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices. 19A number of those who practised magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins. 20So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Magicians burned their books. That cost them \$\$\$ and power. This is huge. Confronted by the power and truth of Jesus Christ, these men saw the darkness and emptiness of their work. Their craft was to trick people into seeing things, believing in powers that did not exist. And they knew it.

### **The Word of God prevails**

23 About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. 24A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. 25These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, 'Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. 26You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. 27And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.'

These artisans, unlike the magicians, are not willing to give up their trade. Demetrius is a leader and a clever one. He and the other silversmiths made lovely statues of the goddess Artemis. The kind you could get at the temple gift shop, as it were. Small shrines you could take home and worship in the comfort of your living room, or household shrine room, as many people would have had.

You can see on your bulletin cover one artist's rendition of the Temple of Artemis in ancient Ephesus. Artemis was a Greek goddess known as the Huntress, or goddess of the hunt. The twin sister of Apollo, god of the Sun, Artemis was regarded as the goddess of maidens and protector of young girls. Most of the stories about her were of her virtue and her strength as a hunter. Temples and statues and shrines

throughout the Mediterranean world of the Greeks. But the biggest and most famous of all the temples was in the city of Ephesus. And for some reason, Artemis of the Ephesians was also worshiped as a goddess of motherhood and fertility. And the temple in Ephesus so famous, so spectacularly beautiful, it was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. One of the seven most impressive examples of architecture and artistry that human hands and minds had constructed. Originally built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and then again in 4<sup>th</sup> century BC after it had been partially destroyed by invaders.

People came from all over the known world to worship at the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. The temple was a moneymaker for hundreds, if not thousands, of artisans and merchants in the city. Demetrius is no fool. He knows that if people really start to believe what Paul and all these Christians are saying, that *gods cannot be made by human hands*, then he'll be out of work and the whole economy of his city will crumble.

In staff this week, Nathan posed the question: what if Christians really stood against the sins of the world that made people incredibly wealthy, such as pornography, human trafficking, drug cartels? It would be dangerous. Would God triumph? Would the word of God prevail? There are people like this Demetrius of Ephesus who would do everything they can to stop people from dismantling their profession, the thing that brings our wealth, as he says.

What does Demetrius do? He gathers those who don't want to see their way of life nor their artwork destroyed – and he starts a riot:

28 When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' 29The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travelling-companions. 30Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; 31even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theatre. 32Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.33Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defence before the people. 34But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'

Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! FOR TWO HOURS! I know many of you are starting to look at your watches to see how long worship has already gone so far and when it's going to end. TWO HOURS chanting *Great is Artemis of the Ephesians*. I wouldn't think it possible, except that I've been to a Seattle Sounders game. Joined in the March to the Match, which starts in Pioneer Square, about 3 blocks from the stadium. Several hundred people in green, waving their Sounders scarves, and chanting. Led by a group of guys shouting the chants. Now, they have a variety of songs and chants. Not just the same six

words over and over. But they start an hour before the game, chant all through the game, and then go on for another good hour after the match, well, if we win, anyway.

First we had the magicians, artisans of magic, who saw the emptiness of their craft and were willing to give it up. Then Demetrius and the artisans of silver, men who would dare to make with their hands something for others to worship.

Ann read for us a passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. *2:9-10 For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Demetrius wanted to be saved by his work, the work of his hands, a work that he was only too quick to boast about. And that is the falseness of the Temple of Artemis, the temples of every human-made idol in every time and every place – whether they be myths or emperors or sports franchises, or Super Bowl quarterbacks – we cannot save ourselves by our own hands and our own work. We are only saved by grace through faith, a gift from God.

A God who is the ultimate artisan, who fashions not statues of stone or metal, but human beings, men and women, flesh and blood, in the image of the Triune and Almighty God. We are God's workmanship, created not to be worshiped ourselves, but made for good works in the world, work God has prepared for us to do. Preaching the Word of God. Trusting that it will prevail. Ministering to the sick and homebound. Working for justice and mercy for the oppressed. And worshiping not the works of humans, but the One in whom we live and move and have our being. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.