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HOW ROMAN LAW AND ORDER STOPPED AN ANGRY MOB

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 81
ACTS 19:30-41

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ACTS 19:30-41 "And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

The mob is now in progress in Ephesus. It is a shouting mob, and usually the more you shout the less you have to say. They shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians". They did this for about two hours. Usually slogans like this don't mean anything, something like, "I'd rather fight than switch". But we are going to see how thinking prevailed over mob action and confusion. A mob never thinks. A mob cannot solve any problems. In history mobs have never solved anything at any time. And mobs cannot be permitted to continue without chaos being the result.

ACTS 19:30-31 "And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre." In these two verses we have the protection given Paul. Paul evidently had been ill in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. But even in his weakened condition Paul wanted to go out before the mob. In 2 Cor. 1:8-10 and Romans 16:3-4 we have scripture that intimates that Paul was sick and that Priscilla and Aquila protected him and would not let him go before the mob. Instead they stepped out and faced the mob and probably saved the life of Paul. The mob had been diverted into the amphitheatre and here they could do little damage. They were finally contained in the amphitheatre and after about two hours of shouting they were calmed and straightened out. This mob will have the fear of the Roman Empire thrown at them and this will sober them rather quickly. Ephesus was a Roman free city and Roman law was very powerful there. But remember this, no matter whether the cause is right or wrong, no mob can ever solve anything.

We read, "Paul would have entered". The word "Would" comes from "Boulomai" and refers to a desire in the soul. This was not an emotional decision Paul made but one he had thought out very carefully. Paul felt he could have reasoned with the mob, but in this instance Paul was absolutely wrong. It was not God's will for Paul to face that angry mob. The mob could not be handled by some preacher like Paul, it would take the full power of Roman law to do that job. This mob was literally about to threaten the freedom on the city of Ephesus. But Paul was a very determined man and the word "Boulomai" means that he kept on wanting to go out where they were. This is preparing us for the greatest mistake Paul would ever make when he would go to Jerusalem against

the will of God. It will take up five chapters in the Book of the Acts to explain Paul's mistake and he will serve several years in jail for his mistake. Were it not for the fact that God turned cursing into blessing he would have been killed in Jerusalem. Paul was warned by the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. He was warned by his friends not to go. And when he did get to Jerusalem he took the advise of the legalists and took a vow and as a result he almost lost his life. He took this vow contrary to everything he wrote in Galatians and contrary to every principle of grace. In Jerusalem Roman soldiers stepped in and saved his life. We are going to see warning after warning given to Paul to stop him from the trip to Jerusalem, but Paul was a very determined man. So in this instance we see the tendency for Paul to take things into his own hands. But we read that the Chiefs of Asia, very prominent men in Ephesus, also assisted in stopping Paul from going into the theatre.

In the coming chapters of Acts we will see that Paul had a passion for the Jerusalem Jews and nothing could stop him from going there. Paul was indeed the greatest grace man of all time, but here we see him trying to take things out of the hands of God, and when he finally does take things in his own hands, God had to step in and place him in jail for two years in Caesarea and two years in Rome. So here Priscilla and Aquila prevented Paul from facing that mob. We read that they "Suffered him not" and it means that they kept on saying no over and over again as Paul tried to get out of his sick bed and face that mob. The Asiarchs, or rulers of Asia, wouldn't let Paul go out to the mob. You see, during the month of May the Asiarchs were very busy and important people. They were in charge of the special activities that went on in Ephesus during the month-long Mardi Gras kind of celebration that took place every May in Ephesus. They served as directors of the calendar of events during these celebrations. The Asiarchs were wealthy men and men of influence but they were also friends of the Apostle Paul. They had great admiration for Paul and therefore they ordered him not to go out into that mob.

ACTS 19:32 "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together." With Paul now settled down in the house of Priscilla and Aquila, let us turn our attention to the mob. It says, "They kept on shouting". Shouting people never do have the real issue in proper focus. No one was doing any constructive thinking in that mob. A mob never does think. No preacher, no minister of the Gospel, ever should be found marching or participating in a mob. And every time you see a preacher marching in a mob or demonstrating, you just know that he is really out of his mind. It is not an act of courage to demonstrate for civil disobedience. A mob cannot think and noise is one of their greatest weapons, and noise is an enemy of truth and thinking. Noise is an enemy of Bible doctrine. Shouting can never drown out the truth. Shouters stop thinking and allow fear to possess them. One lie amplified by thousands of voices does not turn it into the truth. This mob we are now studying shouted for two hours and the lie was not changed.

Please notice it says that the mob was "Confused". The perfect tense means they were confused when they started and they were confused when they stopped. "Confused" means that they surrendered their ability to think to noise and frustration. The majority didn't even know what the issue was. Demetrius was the head of the Silversmiths Union Local No. 1 and they were there to get rid of Paul. But the mob didn't understand all of this. The people in a mob are always pawns, led into something by the power grabbing few. When you participate in a mob, the only party you help is the Communist Party. The Communists always capitalize on confusion.

ACTS 19:33 "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people." The Jews became frightened and they pushed out their lawyer, a man named Alexander. Later on Paul in 1st and 2nd Timothy will warn Timothy about this shrewd and evil man named Alexander. Alexander waved his hands to try to silence the mob but they gave no attention to him.

ACTS 19:34 "But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians." When the crowd realized that Alexander was a Jew that just set them off for two hours of shouting. A thoughtless, emotional, crazy mob took the attitude of "Don't confuse me with the facts for I've already made up my mind".

ACTS 19:35 "And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Here we meet the mayor of the city. The word is "grammateus" and it is equivalent to what we know as mayor. He controlled the city. He was a very capable man and we are going to see him quiet the mob. Rome had many bad things about their empire, but they also had many great characteristics and one was law and order. The mayor had sense enough to know that if the Roman Government ever heard about this wild mob, the free status of Ephesus might be in jeopardy. He silenced and pacified the people which shows the respect they had for his high office. Please notice that he called them "Noble men of Ephesus". He quickly reminded them that the whole city worshiped the great Goddess Diana. The mayor knew how to silence and appease them. He said, "Rome knows this is the worship center for Diana and this is the reason why we are a free city".

This was the sum and substance of his talk. Then the mayor reminded them of a little of their sacred history. He referred to the legend that one day when Jupiter was looking down from Heaven he looked over the world and said, "Where can I put this beautiful Goddess Diana?" The mayor then reminded them that Jupiter chose Ephesus as the spot and he threw Diana down and the people gathered around and built the beautiful temple around her. Of course, the truth was that some contractors got together and built the statue and built the temple. But it made a nice story to tell that Diana was thrown down by Jupiter. It added to their ego and mystery and gave them a greater excuse for their wild worship of Diana. The impact of the mayor's talk was this--"We know the great divine origin of Diana and we are not going to let some little insignificant Jew preacher like Paul come in here and upset our way of life".

ACTS 19:36 "Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly." The mayor said in substance--"No one can contradict our importance and position. We are recognized by Rome and since this is true, we ought to calm ourselves and not ruin our position and prominence by such a thing as a thoughtless mob". With this kind of a speech the mayor was able to quiet the mob.

ACTS 19:37 "For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess." They used the temples as their banking centers and the mayor reminded them that Paul and his followers had not tried to rob their temple. He then went on to remind them that Paul had never blasphemed the name of the great Goddess Diana. This is a very important point. Paul had talked about Christ, and had not centered his attack on Diana. Paul had preached a positive gospel about Christ. This is to be our method. We are not to spend our time shouting against the evils of our day, but we are to present Christ. Once people in Ephesus embraced Christ they dropped the worship of Diana like a hot potato. The moment they accepted Christ they walked out on Diana. We are all against Communism and slavery and injustice, but the best way to confront these things is to present Christ.

ACTS 19:38-39 "Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly." The sum of the mayor's message was this--"Let us settle this matter in a lawful assembly. We have the best lawyers and you know that under Roman law justice prevails here. Rome will not tolerate a mob".

ACTS 19:40 "For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse." The mayor realized that once Rome heard of the mob they would want to know what it was all about for they never would tolerate anything like an angry mob. In a Roman province everything had to be done in decency and in order.

ACTS 19:41 "And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly." Thus the mayor dismissed the assembly. Christianity was able to grow for in the fullness of time, God had raised up the Roman Government to give protection and keep the law and order.

This passage teaches us the function of human government. The state is a divine institution and through the state, God gives his people protection so they can promote missions and evangelism.