

Counting the Cost
Acts 19:21-41
Rev. Brian Bill
November 13-14, 2021

This week I was working on this message at a McDonald's when I met a man who told me to keep the sermon short. Did one of you put him up to this? Before leaving, he passed along some words of wisdom: *"The brain can only absorb what the seat can endure."* I'm going to take that to heart today, because we're going to take time to pray for persecuted believers at the end of the service.

Wouldn't it be great to be alive during the time of the early church and see the events in the Book of Acts unfold? It would be incredible to witness thousands of people come to Christ in one day, to see God answering prayer, and to experience entire communities transformed by the gospel.

Living for Christ no easy in the early church. Someone captured it like this: *"A Christian [back then] was completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble."* The first Christians counted the cost and were sold out to Christ. There weren't many cultural Christians because it was way too difficult to identify with Christ and then not live for Him. It's becoming that way in our culture today, which is a good thing. I see more and more Christians becoming more committed to Christ and more convictional in their doctrine and discipleship!

In Matthew 16:24-25, Jesus spelled out the cost of following Him: ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."***

Please turn to the second half of Acts 19 as we continue in our journey through the Book of Acts. We're going to learn *it's costly to follow Christ, but the cost is worth it*. I see three different costs we'll need to pay as Christ-followers.

- The cost of our plans
- The cost of our popularity
- The cost of our persecution

1. The cost of our plans. Listen to Acts 19:21-22: ***"Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' And having***

sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” The phrase *“after these events”* refers to the events in the first part of the chapter. After magnifying the name of the Lord Jesus, people confessed their unrighteousness and repented of their sins. As a result, verse 20 says, *“So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”*

Paul *“resolved in the Spirit”* to take another journey. In his spirit he wanted to go with the gospel, and He believed the Holy Spirit wanted Him to go. His plan was to travel back to *“Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem.”* When looking at a map [show map], it seems strange Paul would want to travel west because Jerusalem was to the east.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 gives us insight into his motivation. Paul wanted to pick up a generous offering these churches collected for the poorer believers in Jerusalem. In verse 2, he gave them some giving guidelines, which apply today: *“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside.”* Giving is one of our four values because we believe when we give what God has given us, He is glorified, and the gospel goes out to our neighbors and the nations. We have Giving Boxes in our lobbies and an online option through the app and website.

After delivering this offering, Paul’s plans were to go to Rome: *“I must also see Rome.”* Rome was the political center of the known world. Notice he uses the word *“must,”* showing it was an imperative necessity for him. From this point on in Acts, we see his determination to take the gospel to Rome. He put his desire into words in Romans 1:13: *“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented).”*

While Paul made plans to get to Rome, it didn’t happen *when* he wanted it to, nor did it happen in the *way* he intended. He was arrested in Jerusalem, detained in Caesarea for two years, and eventually, by way of shipwreck, arrived in Rome as a prisoner.

Because Paul couldn’t leave immediately, he sent Timothy and Erastus, while *“he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”* Proverbs 16:9 says, *“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”* As someone has said, *“If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.”*

Do you get frustrated when your plans get upended or don’t happen at all? I do. Remember this truth: *God works through people and our problems to accomplish His purposes.* Because God changed Paul’s plans, he had more time to devote

himself to the effective work in Ephesus as described in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9: ***“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”*** Opportunity often arrives with adversity.

Many of these adversaries begin to surface in the next section. *It’s costly to follow Christ, but the cost is worth it.*

2. The cost of our popularity. Listen to verse 23: ***“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way.”*** One of the names for Christianity was the ***“Way,”*** which is a reference to Jesus being the only way in John 14:6. This is a descriptive name, though it’s been sabotaged by a cult today. Paul referenced this disturbance, which was more like an out-of-control riot, in 2 Corinthians 1:8: ***“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.”***

As we established last week, the devil causes disturbances to distract unbelievers and attack believers. That’s why we must put on the armor of God daily. BTW, we have some additional “How to Put on the Armor of God” booklets at the Welcome Center. EBC member Drew Debrey, after reading the booklet, posted these words: *“This is the most convicting study of the armor of God I have ever absorbed. I have certainly been living as though Satan did not exist...this is a ‘must read today’ kind of thing.”*

Listen to verses 24-27: ***“For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.’”***

Artemis, also known as Diana in Roman mythology, was considered the goddess of hunting and fertility. She was pictured as a grotesque, multi-breasted woman. Along with idol worship, there was a lot of indulgence and immorality among her adherents. According to local legend, Artemis had fallen from the sky near

Ephesus, so these superstitious people made her a goddess (historians believe this was a meteorite). One inscription found at Ephesus refers to her as “*the greatest god.*”

The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and took 220 years to build. This magnificent building was longer than a football field. It covered an area four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens and was supported by 127 marble columns, each weighing 150 tons. This temple also functioned as a bank, with merchants and kings depositing their gold and silver because its safety was supposedly guaranteed by the goddess Artemis herself.

Demetrius was a silversmith, providing silver to craftsmen, who made statuettes of the goddess Artemis, along with miniature models of her temple. During the spring, worshippers would arrive in Ephesus to participate in a drunken festival to Artemis, which was filled with decadent debauchery.

As more and more people came to faith in Christ, they stopped worshipping Artemis and therefore had no need for shrines or statues. Demetrius was alarmed by this and stirred up the craftsmen by appealing to three powerful and personal motivations.

- **Pocketbook.** Paul’s preaching hit them in the pocketbook. Check out verse 25: “*Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth...*” Demetrius was trying to rile them up by telling them new believers in Jesus were ruining their business.
- **Piety.** Next, Demetrius painted a bullseye on Paul by appealing to their piety in verse 26: “*And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.*” One of the greatest hindrances to the gospel is organized religion. Did you catch Demetrius referred to him as “*this*” Paul? Paul wrote about the power of the Gospel over false gods in 1 Thessalonians 1:9: “*You turned to God from idols.*” Incidentally, the craftsmen would know these gods weren’t real because they had made them. Psalms 115:4-5: “*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.*”
- **Patriotism.** In verse 27, he appealed to their nationalism, implying Ephesus would lose its place of prominence in Asia and the whole world if Artemis

adoration was curtailed: “...*Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.*” The phrase, “*counted as nothing*” means, “*reckoned as not even one thing*” and “*magnificence*” means, “*brightness, glory, and majesty.*” If people stopped worshipping Artemis, the city of Ephesus would lose its luster and reputation among other cities.

This week I reached out to some of our Go Team partners serving in India and asked if they could share a story about someone who used to be involved in idol worship.

I was brought up in a good Hindu family. We went to the temple a few times a week to pray and give offerings to the gods...in our home, we had a small pooja room for worshiping the different gods.

In my teenage years, I became even more devout – visiting the temple every day and leading my family in each of the fasting and celebration practices that go along with each Hindu holiday.

The more devout I became, however, the more confused and discouraged I became. How could I know for sure if any of the gods were listening to my prayers? What if I was making one of the gods angry by giving sacrifices to another? And why didn't I have peace when I was doing everything I could to serve and worship the gods?

[Then a family member gave her a picture of Jesus]. *I went home and added the picture of Lord Jesus to the wall with all the pictures of the other gods. I began to pray to Lord Jesus just like I prayed to all the other gods. Every day for two weeks, I prayed to Lord Jesus along with all the other gods.*

Then one day, I lit my incense and began my prayers to all of the gods and to Lord Jesus as well. I walked out of the room to get some more supplies when I heard something like a huge gust of wind blow into the pooja room. I remember thinking that the sound was strange since there are no windows in that room. When I came running in, I saw that every idol that had been standing up on the shelf had fallen to the ground and every picture that had been attached to the wall had come down...all except for the picture of Lord Jesus. In that moment, a feeling of peace flooded my heart and mind for the first time in my life. I looked at the broken idols and the fallen pictures and

said out loud, “If you can’t even keep yourself up on the wall, then you are not worthy of my worship.”

From that day on, I began to seek after Lord Jesus. It took me three full months, but I finally found another believer who could teach me about Jesus. I began to read the Bible and learn about the one true God and about His Son Jesus whose power had been displayed in my very own house. I started faithfully following Jesus and was baptized. I teach Hindi to foreigners in the day and in the evenings, I teach the Bible to teenage girls in a nearby slum. I am so happy to be able to share with others what Jesus Himself shared with me--that He truly is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Are you ready to have your plans change and to lose your popularity? *It’s costly to follow Christ, but the cost is worth it.*

3. The cost of persecution. G. Campbell Morgan’s words are worth pondering: *“The church persecuted has always been the church pure, and therefore the church powerful. The church patronized has always been the church in peril, and very often the church paralyzed.”* One pastor suggests a good question for us to consider: *“Am I doing anything significant enough on behalf of God’s kingdom to stir up the enemy’s opposition?”*

Conflict always arises when the gospel is faithfully preached. Warren Wiersbe said it like this: *“Whenever the gospel is preached in power, it will be opposed by people who make money from superstition and sin.”* If Demetrius’ goal was to rile them up, verse 28 tells us it worked: ***“When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’”***

These workers were emotionally ***“enraged,”*** meaning they were filled with *“impetuous indignation leading to violence.”* The word for ***“crying out”*** refers to the hoarse cry of a raven. I appreciated the insight of one commentator who said, *“The only thing heathenism can do against Paul is to shout itself hoarse.”* No matter how many times they gave Artemis glory and shouted out her greatness, she was impotent to do anything because she didn’t even exist.

After getting riled up, the crowd moved into riot mode in verses 29-32: ***“So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. ³⁰ But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. ³¹ And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends***

of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. ³² *Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.*

Mob mentality had overtaken the crowd, causing so much confusion, ***“most of them did not know why they had come together.”*** We see a lot of this today as people are angry and sometimes don’t even know why.

Our country has experienced how dangerous a confused and enraged crowd can be. As the mob marched up the Arcadian Way, they ***“rushed”*** into the 25,000 theater, like a raging flood. Probably because they couldn’t find Paul, they forcefully seized two of his companions as victims for a makeshift gladiator contest.

Like Paul, our partners in India have heard of angry mobs forming as people turn to Jesus because they stopped going to temples and buying idols affecting this lucrative business in this country. Here are some pictures of a local family’s idol business.

Sensing another gospel opportunity, Paul tried to get into the theater, but the disciples wouldn’t let him because they knew he would be killed. Interestingly, the ***“Asiarchs,”*** who were distinguished officers in Ephesus, and friends of Paul, wouldn’t allow him entrance either. BTW, Paul had the ability to build bridges with unbelievers from all classes, whether they were ordinary people or high-ranking pagan officials. We must do the same.

In verses 33-34, an attempt was made to quiet the crowd, but it backfired: ***“Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’”***

Because many considered Christianity to be a sect of Judaism, the Jews elected Alexander to argue Christians were on their own and were not representing the Jews. The Jews didn’t want to be blamed for the economic downturn and the dishonoring of Artemis. We see again how anti-Semitism rears its ugly head when the crowd wouldn’t even let him speak. Racism in any form is always wrong. While we can’t be certain, this might be the same Alexander Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 4:14: ***“Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.”***

The only thing the crowd could think to do was to drown out Alexander by shouting with one voice, ***“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”*** I’m reminded of the showdown on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18:26 when the priests ***“called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, answer us!’ But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.”*** Elijah mocked them, telling them to shout louder because maybe Baal was deep in thought, asleep, on a road trip, or using the bathroom. I also think of Luke 23:21 when the angry mob mobilized against Jesus by repeatedly shouting these words to Pilate: ***“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”***

In verses 35-41, a second attempt was made to silence the assembly, and this one worked: ***“And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, ‘Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰ For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.’ ⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.”***

The town clerk was like the city manager or mayor. Since Ephesus was considered a “free city,” he made sure they didn’t get on the wrong side of the emperor because Rome was especially suspicious of any hint of sedition. Since riots were unacceptable, he told them if they had issues with the Christians to use the legal system. This settled them down and the assembly scattered.

I find it fascinating how the town clerk described the character of Christians in verse 37: ***“For you brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.”*** These believers were living out Colossians 4:5-6: ***“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”*** They didn’t trash the temple, protest their politics, or attack their idols. What they did do was preach the gospel. We must be winsome if we hope to win some.

It's costly to follow Christ, but the cost is worth it. Are you ready to pay the cost to your plans and to your popularity as you prepare for persecution?

Praying for the Persecuted

Since Jesus laid down His life, *43 million Christians have become martyrs.* Right now, 200 million people face persecution for believing in Jesus and 60% of those people are children.

According to Open Doors USA, in the last year 4,761 Christians were killed for their faith. Also, church buildings have been destroyed or vandalized and people have been put in jail or beaten for no other cause than their beliefs. The top five countries where Christians face the greatest persecution are North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Pakistan.

Hebrews 13:3 says, ***“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”*** The number one thing our brothers and sisters ask is for us to pray for them. Here are four needs they'd like us to pray for.

- Pray for their unshakeable faith.
- Pray for Christian community.
- Pray they will have access to God's Word.
- Pray for peace and contentment.

Spend some time praying for these requests right now.

Over the years, we've shown videos and we've had different people lead us in prayer. Today, I'd like to guide you through some specific requests prepared by Voice of the Martyrs, one of our Go Team partners.

1. **Christians in Iran risk their freedom and lives to place God's Word in the hands of those who do not know Jesus.** *Pray that every Bible distributed in Iran and in every hostile area and restricted nation will be read or listened to, leading many to new life in Christ.*
2. **Gospel workers on the front lines of ministry in Central Asia share the gospel with everyone they meet – even the secret police.** *Related to this, let's pray for the missionaries who have been taken hostage in Haiti. Let's also pray for these front-line workers and others like them to continue*

walking in obedience, joyfully giving their lives in order to lead others to new life in Christ.

- 3. Ethiopian Christians baptize former Somali Muslims in the backyard of a church building that was once a brothel.** *Pray with thanks to God for these new believers in Ethiopia and others like them who are won to Christ on the world's most difficult and dangerous mission fields.*

If you'd like to hear more prayer requests from persecuted believers and be led in prayer by people from those countries, I highly recommend the VOM Radio podcast.

Join me now as I lead in a prayer written by someone who ministers to the persecuted.

Loving Lord, we live in an evil world and know that You are coming back soon for Your Church. Be with all those who are suffering persecution at the hands of so many who would destroy the truth of Your Word.

Help every man and woman, boy and girl going through some form of persecution today. May You guard and guide and encourage each one, no matter where they are.

Give them the strength to remain firm in their faith, despite any physical, emotional, or psychological pain they may have to endure for the sake of Jesus Christ. Protect and keep each one from harm and danger that stalks their path. Hide them under the shadow of Your wing, and support and strengthen them in the ordeals that they will be subjected to.

Lord, we come to You interceding for our suffering sisters and brothers who are walking the path of persecution and pain for Your name's sake. Work through the life of each one, so that Your holy name may be lifted up. Cause those who are inflicting such pain on Your body, the Church, to be brought to the place of true repentance. May they turn from their ungodly ways to discover true forgiveness of their sins, and eternal life, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank You for the faithful witness of these dear, persecuted sisters and brothers in the Lord. Keep each one under Your banner of love, and may Your holy angels minister to all their needs so that they may know Your peace in their heart, a perfect peace that only You can give.

Let Your peace and joy and love reign in their hearts, and help them to walk humbly before You, as they identify with the sufferings the Lord Jesus endured for them. And Father, may their lives, and possibly their deaths, be a fruitful witness leading to much fruit.

And may we endure changes in our plans, attacks on our popularity, and the grace to be faithful when we're persecuted here where we live. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

New Member – Hannah Herrman (10:45)