



## **Wisdom & Maturity – Part 4**

### **Fully Aware of Our Society's Idolatry**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

So, how are things going? (audience applauds) I don't mean with you. I mean with us. How are things going with us? I don't mean me and you, I mean, like all of us. Like, how are things going with all of us? I mean, how do you think they're going with all of us? I don't mean all of us here in church. I mean, like all the people everywhere. Like humans. Like, how is it going with humans right now? With, like, humanity around the world? Our generation. How's it going with that? Uh. Not as good as the answer the first time.

As a matter of fact, God gave us, Jesus in particular in Matthew 24, gave us a particular historical reference point to tell us how it would be going when he has to step in and deal with it. Five words: "like the days of Noah." Like the days of Noah. And if I were to ask how were things going in the days of Noah? I mean, you know your Bibles well enough to know, not so good. Not so good. As a matter of fact, Genesis 6 verse 5 says, "And the wickedness in the earth was great," and not like great, good. Like it was like everywhere. Here's how the rest of the verse goes. It says in "every intention of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually."

So how are things going? Not very good. And Jesus said, Matthew 24, it will once again be like that. And yet it's not all dark clouds. There is a silver lining because in Genesis 6 verse 8, three verses later it says, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." So it's not all bad, which I hope, like when you think how's it going with us? Pretty good. But it's really not going very good if you read the headlines, if you follow anything beyond what you might be experiencing in your own life, it's like it's going really poorly. It's going poorly.

It's much like in the days of Noah, there was the favor of God on some people. Actually, it was a very small group of people, it was Noah. And so God said, hey, build this barge, this big floating thing, and it will take years to construct it. You will be a preacher of righteousness. We'll have this big door and it will flop open and it will remain open, available to the generation of people there who you're living among. And we'll get a bunch of animals in there. And really, I mean, you can imagine anybody who wants to come can come.

But how many people came? Not many. Just a little small group of people. Just his wife and his sons and his daughters-in-law and that was about it. Why? Well, because in that wicked generation, they were busy with other stuff. They had other stuff going on. Now, the real stuff they needed was there on that ark because God's judgment was coming. So they needed to stop dealing with all their stuff and then they start dealing with God's stuff. They need to see their sin and recognize that they could escape the judgment of God through God's appointed means. This ark. It was there. This box, this barge was there. But they were busy with other stuff.

Which the other stuff leads us to the topic and text that we're studying this morning in Acts Chapter 19. It really is a passage about other stuff, which is the definition of the topic that



we're dealing with in this passage. It's a passage, as you'll see, it's filled in Acts Chapter 19 with people who were idolaters. And if you want a good technical definition of idolatry, what is an idol? Here it is, two words, Mike Fabarez definition: "other stuff." There's your theological definition of idols, other stuff. It's other stuff and it's other stuff that gets in the way of the thing that we really need and really, I suppose, made in the image of God, things we really should want. As Augustine said, there is that sense in which we recognize our hearts are restless till we find rest in him and get a seat on the ark. That's important.

And so in this passage, you'll remember that Paul is on his third missionary journey and he is in Acts 19 in a place called Ephesus. It's in Asia, Asia Minor it's called, on the western coast of what we know of now as the modern nation of Turkey. And he's making plans in verses 21 and 22, and he's going to execute those plans. God's going to carry those plans out in his life for the rest of the book of Acts really provides a little outline for where we're going in the book of Acts. But what takes place next, if you've opened your Bibles, and I wish that you would, to the particular passage, we're going to study verse 21, they're going to cut in the middle of this narrative in verse 28, and that's all we're going to cover today. But in this particular set of eight verses, you'll see that the heading above Paul's plans is not Paul's plans. It's a riot in Ephesus. Do you see that? There's going to be a riot here.

And we'll get into the riot proper, the heart of it in verses 29 and following, but in verses 21 through 28, what I want to look at here is what's going on in the rationale of what's happening in the city as they see the gospel as a threat. Now, remember what we've just come off of in the previous verses. We've seen this weird scene with the seven sons of Sceva who were overpowered by the demons. And I told you at the outset, last time we were studying this passage, that Ephesus was known for its superstitions, its incantations, its gods, its goddesses, its deities. And everyone now had recognized, as word got out, this Jesus that Paul was preaching is really exalted above all that "and the name of Jesus, the Lord Jesus was extolled," you might remember that line.

And then it ends with this great line in verse 20 that "the word of the Lord, it was prevailing," it was going out. It was being magnified, it was advancing, it was continuing to do good things in Ephesus. But that didn't mean that everyone was getting a seat on the ark. There were a lot of people who were fighting against this. There comes a guy on the scene here that we're going to look at who's got a speech to give that kind of puts it all into sharp focus. And I think if you read a passage about idolatry, your tendency is like so many others in the western 21st-century world, to think, well, that's a bunch of dolts from history who bow down to, you know, shrines as though it's not happening around the world today. But you think you're beyond that because you carry around a phone in your pocket.

Here's the deal. I'm trying to, as you see in the subtitle of this sermon, get us to recognize that our generation is just as entrenched and embroiled with the problem of idolatry as theirs was because idolatry can be defined as other stuff. We'll try and define that. But first, let's read the passage. Starting in verse 21. We'll see Paul making some plans and then we'll see the problem of idolatry and the threat to it that the gospel poses as we study verses 23 to 28. Let's start in verse 21, "Now after these things," and I just reference those. Look back up and

you'll see all the things that had gone on in that great line as it ends there that "The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily." That's good.

After all that, "Paul resolved in the Spirit," which in Greek we don't know that that's a capital "S." That could mean in his spirit. And yet the English Standard Version translators translate it with a capital "S" like in The Spirit, like God's Spirit, because what he says next actually takes place. So he's making plans. It's his resolve. He's resolving, but it happens to be a resolve that God is going to carry out. So providentially, he's making the right choices here because this is how the rest of the book goes. He passes "through Macedonia and Achaia and then he goes on to Jerusalem." And after these things he says, "I must see Rome." And that's where he ends up. No reference here to the fact that he's going to be a prisoner as he goes to Rome. But he's going to get to Rome.

Verse 22, "And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while." Now did you catch that, what's happening here? He is going to go to Macedonia and Achaia in northern Greece and in southern Greece, He's going to deal with the cities we've already encountered over there in the second missionary journey. He's going to get there and he's going to spend time there. But before he goes, he's going to stay in Asia, which is Ephesus, in and around Ephesus, but he's sending two of his missionary partners over there. Erastus we don't know much about, but we know he's sent over and maybe that's a common name so it could be the Erastus who is spoken of in First Corinthians is not the same. Nevertheless, he's sending two of these people over there to do some missionary work ahead of him, and then he's going to get there.

So those are his plans. Now, while he's making those plans, "About that time," he's making those plans, verse 23, "there arose no little disturbance." Now that's kind of an archaic way of saying it, but that means that there's a big disturbance, "concerning the Way." Now, you know, the Way means Christianity. It was considered the Way, this sect that Jesus was "the way, the truth and the life." This was the answer to the Old Testament messianic promises. And Paul was teaching this is the way. It's the only way. It's the right way. It's the "only way given under heaven among men by which we must be saved." So the Way it was called here. And they realized that the teaching of Paul and Christianity in Ephesus was causing a disturbance.

Why? "For," purpose clause, verse 24, "a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis." We talked about that last time. This is a city of a quarter of a million people. 250,000 people lived here, and every spring they had a big Artemis Festival and people would travel much like they did to Jerusalem to worship the true God. They would travel to Ephesus, many of them, and the hotels would be filled, the convention centers would be filled. And one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis, or in the Roman language, the Temple of Diana, she was also called, was there and everyone was worshiping there at the temple. Everyone was giving deference and trusting in this deity, this goddess. And then the marketplace was filled with people like Demetrius, who was selling things like these silver shrines of Artemis.



Verse 25. "These he gathered together," the craftsmen. Did I read the bottom of verse 24? Okay, let me read that. "He brought no little business to the craftsmen." Of course, they're making shrines. Just, you know, you go to Paris, you go to the Eiffel Tower, people selling these little things around. Well, those aren't for you to set up a shrine to worship. But it's the same kind of idea at least that they've got miniatures maybe of the temple. They've got miniatures of the deity herself. And they're taking them home. They're building shrines, and they're doing that out of silver. So this is high dollar stuff, at least, you know, among the others, they're craftsmen making replicas of this goddess and of her temple.

And he gathered together the craftsmen. So the guild is here together with the workmen of similar trades, they're doing all kinds of things and selling all kinds of things on the backs of these people who are trying to worship Artemis. "And he says, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.'" and they're wealthy, they're doing well, they're selling high dollar stuff, maybe some not so high dollar stuff. But he says, "You see and you hear that not only in Ephesus," not here where we live, not just here where we live, "but also in all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that the gods made with hands are not gods." Now we're making gods with our hands. And he's saying they're not anything. You can take that thing home and it doesn't mean anything. Well, that isn't good for business.

Verse 27, "And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute." You may think why buy this stuff if it doesn't mean anything? "But also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing." What if they think that Artemis is nothing? "And that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all of Asia and the world worship." Everyone is coming from Asia Minor to come and worship. I mean, what would happen to our society? I mean, that's why there's no little disturbance concerning this teaching of Paul, the Way. "Now, when they heard this they were enraged," and they "were crying out, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" Great is Diana, great is Artemis of the Ephesians that is our place.

Now drop down to verse 34. We're going to see as this reaches a fever pitch in verse 34, "they were crying out for two hours with one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.'" I mean, you might see this with some sports team or something, or you go to Europe and soccer and they're yelling. It's all about their team. And their team is the great goddess Artemis, or so she's called. So this is an idolatrous society and idolatrous city. There are a bunch of businesses that depend on the idolatry of it all. Paul comes in saying, "Hey, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's the one. He's the Way," and causes a lot of trouble.

Now, again, you probably, I hope, didn't go buy some trinket or some shrine or some amulet or some kind of lucky charm of some kind so that you could worship it, that it could do some benefit to your life. But here's my contention that we have in our world a ton of idolatrous things that get in the way of what God would have us trust in, which is him himself, he himself. That's what he's called us to do.



So what I want to do is just look at the centerpiece of this and Demetrius' speech and I want to understand the idolatry in our day. I put it this way, we need to see, number one, "Idolatry in Daily Pursuits." And I'd like to think, even though I don't like you to get in the pattern of thinking about everyone outside the walls of the church when I preach to you, let's at least, though, start by thinking that way. If you think about your non-Christian friends and neighbors and coworkers and you think about how they live life, I want you to think about how they are pursuing the same things that they were pursuing in Ephesus in the first century even though your friends and your neighbors and your coworkers may not be bowing down to a silver shrine. And all I'm saying is it's the same thing.

So let's understand idolatry in the most basic sense. Okay? And let's think about it this way. That idolatry, if you're to look at it, the first instance of it in Genesis Chapter 3, what we have are people falling to idolatry. And you remember the one thing I often say about the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3, they were in it for themselves, right? They wanted a benefit from breaking God's rules, and they were all about themselves. And remember the pitch of the tempter was, "if you eat of this fruit, God knows that you will be like him." So you can advance, you can move up, you can have an advantage. And that's really, let's just start with that basic component of the definition, and that is idolatry, basically is something where you are the purposed beneficiary. You become the one who is served by this means, whatever that means is.

Let's think about it this way. "Idol" is another transliterated word, by the way, in the Greek New Testament like "angel" and "baptism" and "apostle." Idol, if you were to pronounce it in Greek, sounds a lot like our English word "idol" and represents the concept of something that you can see. "Image," sometimes it's translated. And if you think about what's going on in the Garden, God is the God that he's made man and woman in his image. And he's saying, "Okay, now I'm giving you a visible world that you are going to interact with and see. And here are the instructions, you are to exercise dominion over that world. You're in charge, right? Starting with naming the animals, and then you're going to work the land and you're going to be in charge of things here. You're going to exercise dominion much like I exercised dominion. But you, in a derivative sense, are going to exercise dominion in this world." Okay.

Satan comes in to tempt and he manifests himself as a creature of creation. And here's the first thing you ought to see about that. That the pitch to say you are going to eat this fruit and this fruit will make you better, you will be the purposed beneficiary of this act is coming from a creature that Adam and Eve were supposed to exercise dominion over. In other words, you're not supposed to take your cues from a snake, right? You're not supposed to listen to the animals. They're supposed to listen to you. You are in charge of them. They are not in charge of you.

And so here is this picture of something in creation, something they can see, something that could interact with. And it is now telling them if you just now go and take this other thing that you can see and interact with, take that fruit that looks so good, and if you would just put your trust in the eating of that particular piece of fruit, you know that you will be the purposed beneficiary of some advantage. So take it and have it for yourself because God knows that



you will be better off if you have it. And so you just need to disregard what God says about himself and about you. And I know he makes the rules and all, but in this case, you can bend the rules or, you know, break the rules because you can take advantage of things that will help get in the way in this case of you and God so you can really be the purposed beneficiary.

I don't know, that sounds a little philosophical, so let me get really simple. There are three categories in reality. Let's put it this way. There's you. There's God. Here's the third category. And everything else. Let's just think about it that way. There's you. There's God, and then there's all the other stuff. Let's think about that. And your call as a Christian or even as a person in the Garden, let's say, is to put your focus on God and recognize that you are made for him. He's not made for you. Creation is made for you. You're supposed to tame it and be in charge of it. But God is supposed to be in charge of you. And so you have you and you have God and that should be the main focus of your life.

To put it in New Testament terms, Jesus says that when it comes to your life, you're supposed to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. So my focus should be I live for the glory of God, whether I eat or drink, all I do for God's glory. I'm focused on the fact that I am made for God. God is the center of all things. He's the top of all things. He is to be extolled, the Triune God if I think about it in terms of Genesis 6, he knows as sinners, in our case from our perspective, that we need to be freed from the penalty of our sins. He's provided his Son as the ark, let's just put it that way, the means and mechanism of our salvation. I need to focus on getting on the ark, getting right with Christ, the only name under heaven by which I must be saved. And I will glorify God and the Spirit of God is helping me do that, pushing me to do that. He's working my heart to get me to do that. And then I give all glory to Christ. He's the King of kings, Lord of lords. Every tongue should confess, and that will bring glory to God, the Father.

So I'm concerned with the Triune God. I'm made for that God. So there's me, there's God, and then there's everything else. Here's the problem. When everything else gets between me and God, if I take my life and I think about my relationship with God and I think, well, you know, God in this case in the Garden, you know, he's just trying to keep something from me. If I would just take the other stuff, in this case it's a talking snake and a piece of fruit, and I would see that as a means to make myself the purposed beneficiary then I can engage in that. And that would be for my good. Of course, that's called idolatry. Other stuff gets in the way. The thing I need is a relationship with God. The thing that's going to mess this up is me chasing after the other stuff.

Now let me quote the rest of Matthew Chapter 6. The preceding verse is that you know here's the problem. People are worried about all kinds of things. Stop worrying, Mike Fabarez paraphrase. You are supposed to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Right? All these things that they're chasing after in the previous verse, verse 32, the pagans chase after all these things. The Lord knows you need them. You got to have them. You need food, you need a paycheck, you need a job, you need a house, you need clothes, you need transportation, you need all that. But you should not put the other stuff in front of you and God, that should never come between you. And so if you would seek me and my kingdom



and my righteousness, then all the other stuff I'll take care of that. You need to trust me. Don't put the other stuff as a means to get something you think you want. Whether it's transcendent or whether it's practical. It's not a means to an end. It's a useful commodity and you need it. But you need to trust me.

And in this world that we live in, where we can see all the stuff of this world and there are threats and there are problems and there are opportunities and there are challenges and there are open doors. I just want you to trust me. You put your confidence in me. That's what it means to be a Christian. I'm trusting in God. So the other stuff becomes the idolatry that gets between me and God.

Now in Ephesus, they had a lot of gods. You could start with going back to, you know, Zeus and the whole pantheon of gods in Rome, and they were everywhere in the ancient world. But in Ephesus they had a resident place, because they believed that she came down, it was probably a meteor of some kind that hit Ephesus back in the third or fourth century B.C. and from that they took that stone and they made this belief about this goddess. And they said this goddess, starting with the, you know, the Greeks, the idea of Artemis being the provider in the sense that she was depicted as a hunter, and then she was eventually idolized and made an icon. And maybe you've seen this or we got free Wi-Fi. You can look it up. It's weird and gross, but she's depicted as this goddess with a basket on her head providing and all these breasts hanging off of her torso. And because she was the God of provision and the God of fertility and the God of granting what you need.

And so the goddess in this one of the seven wonders of the world, this gigantic, huge temple was something that now I could trust in, some of the stuff I can see in life. It can now be the means of making myself the purposed beneficiary of some good. That God, by the way, says, I know what you need. And really what you need is me. You need a relationship with me. You need to trust me. And you know what? You need to pursue my kingdom, my righteousness, which will mean you will probably get a job. Of course, you will probably have to figure out what you're going to drive and going to have to figure out what you're going to wear and where are you going to live. You have to deal with all that, but it's not going to be the thing that you use as some kind of barrier between me and you. That's called idolatry.

What were they seeking these idols for? Why would they buy a shrine in the agora or the marketplace of Ephesus and bring it home and set it up in their house? Because they wanted some purposed benefit. They wanted to benefit from that. So let's break this down with whatever A-B-C-D-E. Is that five things? Five things that they seek. And let's just start with the first one in verse 24. Let's look at verse 24 Demetrius' speech, and here's how it starts. Luke describes him as a man "who made silver shrines of Artemis and it brought in no little business to the craftsmen." So this was what they did, and they did it because there was a market for it, and the market was people came, let's just look at one aspect of what Diana or Artemis was supposed to do. Diana's the Roman name. Artemis is the Greek name. What was she supposed to be?



Well, one thing they were doing and we looked at this last time we were together, we looked at the idea of how these shrines and these images and these amulets were protection for them. Because here's one thing I know about humanity. They're afraid. Have you noticed that? How about in the last few years? Have you noticed? People are afraid. Oh, yeah. No one's tracking with me on that? Ah, really afraid. So what they want is something they can trust in to protect them. Let's put it that way. Letter "A," See Idolatry in Daily Pursuits for Protection." They were buying shrines of silver made by the craftsmen because they thought it would bring, at least in one aspect, some protection to them. That was the first basic thing about idols. "This is my hero. This is my protector. This is someone who has provided for me to bring me protection so I don't have to be afraid. I can trust in this." Okay.

Now, in the ancient world, it might be buying some kind of icon. In the modern world I just want to ask you this question, put your thinking cap on. What do people put in their lives that really does get between them and God that they put their trust in for protection? This was the whole point, as I referenced real briefly last time, that David had a standing army with chariots and horses, but he was very careful that in his heart, at least in the psalms that he wrote, that he wasn't going to put his trust in chariots and horses, because we know that victory is found in the Lord. So I trust in the Lord, even though there's nothing wrong with having chariots and horses if you are the commander-in-chief of a nation. And so he had them, but he didn't trust in them.

Just like Jesus told his apostles at the end of his ministry, if you don't have swords, go sell your cloak and get one. Why? Because you need to trust in swords? No, because I proved to you for the last three years that when I sent you out and told you don't bring swords and don't bring a knapsack and don't bring luggage, don't bring money, don't bring an extra pair of sandals, bring nothing but just come and follow me, you will learn this, that if you trust me, I will provide. At the end of his ministry, though, now let's get back to just being reasonable here about the means by which I usually provide, which is get the things you need. But here's the deal. Never trust in them. That's the point.

There's nothing wrong with medicine, there's nothing wrong with physicians. But we seek those things to protect us. Just like you might have an alarm system, just like you might have one that dispatches to the police if someone comes into your house in the middle of the night, maybe you got a gun stuck under your mattress and you're ready to shoot someone when they come in. And all of those things may be reasonable. But here's the deal. The Bible's very clear it becomes an idol when we trust in this as some other stuff other than God. And let me prove it to you with a very simple verse, Psalm 127. Do you know the beginning of this? When it comes to and we talk about this passage all the time, but others quote one line in it, "Unless the Lord watches the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." Have you ever heard that? Nod at me if you've heard that, right?

If the Lord doesn't watch the city... Watchmen. "No, but I got really good watchmen." It doesn't matter. If the Lord's not watching the city... "Yeah, but I got a big shotgun behind the door." It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. "Yeah, but you don't understand what a good shot he is." It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Whatever you're trusting in to protect you from something





you fear, whether it's your insurance, whether it's your business adviser, whether it's your financial planner, whatever it is that you're trusting in, your portfolio, whether it's just taking at the end of the night your fingers and turning a deadbolt on your door. I'm just saying there's nothing wrong with being reasonable in locking your car when you get out of it at the mall. There's nothing wrong with that. Matter of fact, I would advise it just like Jesus advises to do some basic things that you should do, that everyone should do. But you dare not become an idolater by trusting it.

Now, I want you to think outside the walls of the church. People who do not trust in Christ, they don't follow Christ, they don't pray, they don't read their Bible, they don't... They got nothing but that stuff because they are, by nature, idolaters. "I need something I can see to trust in for protection."

Letter "B," verse 25. These craftsmen. "He gathered together, with the workmen in the trades, and he said, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.'" "We've become rich people through the means of our business and I don't want anyone to take that away because I rely on this business and selling these silver shrines. And if I don't have that, I'm not going to have wealth. Where will I be? They'll foreclose on my suburban Ephesian house. I'm in trouble. I got to have this business. If I don't have this business, it'll be like the publishers of those scrolls. Did you hear they were burning scrolls in the city square in Ephesus? What's going to happen? Where are all those publishers going to make their money? Where are we going to make our money? Why? Because this is my means of prosperity."

And much like we have idols for protection, Letter "A," we also have idols "For Prosperity." Letter "B," we have idols for prosperity. And though you may not believe that the fertility goddess with the basket of bread on her head and a torso full of breasts that are going to somehow symbolize the fact that if you trust in her and you're infertile, you'll have a baby, or that your cows will calf these baby calves or that your fields will grow. You don't trust in a silver shrine. But I just wonder what people are trusting in, let's just think, thinking cap on, a good exercise for your small group this week, what do people trust in that they can see, that they can do, that they can touch, that they can experience that will lead them to prosperity? That they say, "Well, if I have this then I have that."

Well, let's get back to our psalm, Psalm 127. The first line is this: "Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain." Right? It would be good to have a house. That'd be a prosperous thing to have. Be good to own a house. What if you could build your own house? Get the architects, get the builders, get the best materials, get the best builders, let's make sure it's unto code. Let's do it right. "And now I'll have a house to live in for the rest of my life. I will prosper if I have the builders building my house." And the Bible says this: if God's not in this, it ain't going to happen.

So not only can you not put gods between you and God when it comes to your protection, because God is the ultimate rock and defender of people, you cannot prosper unless you have God. God is the one who causes you to prosper. He's the one who does this for you.



And so you need to know this, that it doesn't matter how well you set yourself up for success. The success doesn't come without God. And that we need to understand and we need to understand it clearly that God is the provider of these things. Unless the Lord builds the house, it isn't going to get built.

What do people trust in now? I think of young people. They think, "Oh, if I'm going to prosper in my adult life, I better go to the right school, get the right degree, and make sure that I matriculate through college. Here's the deal. It's no problem having to send your kids to college. But if you're trusting... if a 17-year-old is trusting in that, it's an idol, because that's not any guaranteed means for success, because God is the one who doles out stuff. So we don't trust in that. It's not wrong to have a standing army if you're the commander-in-chief, it's not wrong for you to lock your door or lock your car. But here's the deal. Idolatry in the world, that's all they have and that's what they trust in.

Turn to Ecclesiastes Chapter 5. Ecclesiastes Chapter 5. I want to go one layer deeper on prosperity. Why does Demetrius want to make sure he keeps his business going? Well, because he gets wealthy through his business and he wants that wealth and let's go one level deeper. Why does he want that wealth? Because you know what? It's better to be rich than poor. Why? Because life is going to be better. Why? Because I would enjoy having the better things in life. I would rather drive a nice car than take the bus. I'd rather wear nicer clothes than wear cheap clothes. I would rather have a better house with more modern amenities than I would with some small little one-bedroom apartment. That would be good. I will enjoy it.

Well, first, let's just see that if we're focusing on here is the means by which I can get wealthy, the Bible says you will never find satisfaction. Look at verse 10. This passage, Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 verse 10, it really highlights one of the problems that the book of Ecclesiastes is trying to solve. Whenever you get stuff between you and God, that is idolatry and it will always leave you short. You will always want something that will be in the end, chasing after the wind and vanity of vanities. "He who loves money will never be satisfied with money." Because that's the goal, isn't it? Wouldn't it be good to have all that stuff? Because I will be satisfied. But no. If you love wealth, if you think that's the means and you got this way to do it, whatever it might be, if you're Demetrius with your silver craftsmanship and that's your... Well, here's the thing. If you love it, if that's what it's about, if that becomes the focus of your hope and your trust. Well, you're never going to be satisfied with that. This, too, is vanity. That's the theme of the book.

Well, what do I really want? What I want is what's found in verse 19 of this passage. After all these things in verses 11 through 18 about what happens with money, it's not an answer in itself. What is the answer? I don't want more money because of this. I would like to enjoy life. Well, here's the deal. Verse 19 Ecclesiastes 5, "Everyone also to whom God has GIVEN wealth," where there's the first thing you need to remember, "and possessions," they all come from God, and here's the thing I really want, "the power to enjoy them," that's a gift of God, "to accept his lot," in life, that's called contentment, "and to rejoice in his toil," I like my work, "this is the gift of God."



Where does it come from? Some say, "Well that's the gift of your degree." No, it's not. It's not the gift of your education. No, it's not the gift of your business. It's not the gift of anything. It's not the gift of the last great hire that you had. The answer is that God gives you those things. So I don't want to put stuff between me and God. God is the one. He says, seek me, seek my kingdom, seek my righteousness. If you start putting your trust in these other things, if that becomes your pursuit, that becomes your goal. You need to trust me and I'll add this stuff to you. And the stuff that I add will come with the power to enjoy it and be content. That's what I want.

Verse 20, "For he will not much remember the days of his life." And by that he means the unpacking of all that he's dealt with in the book. And that is the vanity of vanities, the vexation he talks about in verse 17. All of this in the passage. He won't sit there and be constantly focused and torn up inside. No. Why? Because "God keeps him occupied with joy inside." And that is, I think, what people want when they want to get rich. Right? And the Bible says there are plenty of things that people do in our culture to not only have protection because they have fear, but they also have appetites and they want to have stuff so they can be happy, they can be joyful. And so they put a lot of idols in their lives that they can focus on so they can have prosperity.

Back to our passage. Acts 19 verse 26. "You see and hear that not only here in Ephesus but also in all of Asia, Paul has persuaded and turned a great many people away from saying..." From what? From "that gods that are made with hands are not gods." That's what he's saying. And we know that they are gods because what if they weren't gods? I mean, we have power here in connecting to the gods. And in this case, the goddess Diana. I mean, there's power here. You're not going to gut us of the power. And how would that make me feel? I would feel like, you know, everything in my life would be like... It's deflating my ego.

The ego sends people to want to have power. And the reality of walking around with a \$3,000 suit in the top floor of some high rise in Irvine or wherever, I might feel like this is really living. I'm really powerful. I get to tell people what to do. But the reality is in the Bible that real power comes from being connected with the living God. And you can be weak, you can be despised, you can be who knows? You can be nobody. But if you're in with God, if you have reconciliation with God, if you have a quiet time with God, if you're on your knees before God communing with the living God, you can rejoice in your weakness. Because the reality of that external power, that's not the deal. But there are plenty of idols that people say, I want to grasp onto this so I can have power.

Letter "C," "See Idolatry in Daily Pursuits for Power." They want to pursue things that are... It's the other stuff that will make me feel powerful. And I'm just saying we've got to get that in perspective in our minds. The power of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. That great quote unquote, great temple. 60 foot high, 127 columns, all marble. It was the largest Greek temple ever built. And they said, "Well, this is great. It puts Ephesus on the map."

Can you turn real quickly with me to Isaiah 40? Well, you can feel powerful because you work in the greatest company and it's a Fortune 500 company and I have a great role in this and I



make a lot of money and I have all the accouterments and I get people opening doors for me. Great. That's not real power. Because here's the thing about every high rise in Southern California, it one day will be leveled just like the temple to Artemis. Go with me to Ephesus. We've gone there to Ephesus before, we've walked through the ruins of Ephesus, a sprawling ancient city and all the archeology has been done, and they've dug up all the stuff. Guess how many columns of the 127 columns there are left of the temple of Diana, of Artemis. One. And it's only left because they rebuilt it by stacking all the pieces on top of it. One large marble column. And there ain't nothing there. And there's no Diana. It's just gone. And there's nobody selling trinkets of Diana and there's nobody worshipping Diana.

The reality of this all is that all the things that we think are bringing power and fame and giving us a name, they don't mean anything. Look at verse 15. Isaiah 40 verse 15. Matter of fact, when it comes to God and the greatness of knowing God, "all the nations are like a drop in the bucket. They are counted as dust on the scale," something you blow off before you weigh something. But it doesn't even matter because it doesn't take up any weight. "Behold, he takes up the coastlands," God can just pick up the entire coast, "like fine dust. Lebanon" where they grow the great big, gigantic cedars, "would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough," all the animals that live in the forest, "not enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before the greatness of God." By comparison, it's nothing. "They are accounted by him as less than nothing." Which is obviously hyperbole. You can't have less than nothing. But it's making the point. It's nothing-nothing. It's "emptiness."

But, verse 18, "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness will you compare to him?" No idolatry compares to him. "An idol! A craftsman casts it, a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts it with silver chains. He who too is impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot," he tries to find the best wood. "He seeks out skillful craftsmen to set up an idol," tacks it down, "so it won't tip over." This is just a person who is just living among the greatness of a culture that really is nothing more than dust on a scale. It's nothing less than nothing. And he's making something that he thinks is great and he's putting it up and saying, "This is great," and it's not great.

And the reality is that if you want power, what you need to do is to have some connection with the living God as a humble servant before that great power. And that's the reality, because everything in this world that people think is powerful is not powerful. It's more powerful for me to spend an hour with the Lord than to be walking around with the great celebrities of our culture, because they are when it comes down to it, according to this passage, nothing. And neither is Artemis or her temple.

Back to our text, verse 27. This is closely related to the idea of the ego wanting power. But we also want something more than that. We want purpose. Look at verse 27. "And there is a danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute." I mean, we could lose our income and feel like losers. "But the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing." I mean, come on. I mean, that would make all of this, like, what were we doing? It's kind of like those people making those scrolls with the incantations. If the incantations are nothing and people are burning them and it means nothing, well, then what purpose do they have in life?



And let's just tweak this a little from "Power" Letter "C" to "D," let's just call this "See Idolatry in Daily Pursuits for Purpose." People want purpose, and when it comes to purpose, they take the third category, which is other stuff, and they put it in front of them and they say, if I just have this stuff, I can feel like I've got purpose in my life. And all I'm telling you is the Bible says there is no purpose outside of you being reconciled to God. And your neighbor can be all about their hobbies and all about their business and all about their recreation and their European vacations or whatever they're about. But in the end there's no purpose if you are not fulfilling your purpose as a human being made in the image of God, which is to know God and enjoy God. That's the purpose of life. And the reality is that here are these guys going, "Well, what would happen if the person that we're all living for here, the goddess Diana, is reduced to nothing? If Artemis is nothing, then what are we living for?"

That's the whole theme of the book of Ecclesiastes. You don't get the punch line until the end of the book. Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 verse 8. We finally get around to the fact that all that really matters is you and God. And he's going to evaluate your life and see whether or not you got the third category called "stuff" between you and him. All that stuff, in the end, if you put that in front of yourself and say, this is what life's all about, it's "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." It's chasing after the wind. And the purpose of whatever your neighbor is seeking it comes to nothing. Again I put Carl Trueman's truncated book on the back of the worksheet because it does a great job of looking at in a thumbnail sketch the history of how we have, at least in philosophy, come to the place where we have put ourselves as the center of our purpose and we think if I just live for myself, I will be fulfilled. That's the purpose.

And we have today, think about it now, we have today people who have unfettered, like cheerleaders, they're able to go and pursue purpose and find themselves and actualize themselves and be whatever they want. And yet they come away going this really is when I think about it. This is what idolatry does. They come to the end of it all and they go, it's nothing. It actually leads them to where this goes in the bottom of verse 27, there's a "deposing of the magnificence" of all of the idolatry of their lives, this one "whom all of Asia and the world worship."

And if you think about what the world right now is worshipping, the world says if you just do this you will have not only purpose, but let's just add this last one. You'll add "For Peace," Letter "E." I will be at peace if I can just have this. And the reality is, if you look back up at how this all started in verse 23, a great disturbance. There was a disturbance because Paul was meddling by his theology and preaching and the proclamation of the gospel, he was meddling with their purpose and their protection and their prosperity and their power. And ultimately their peace. This is a disturbance and it's going to cause a riot because you can't take this from it. And that's why we have in our culture people who are chasing all this stuff that they think is freedom, that's purpose, that's meaning.

And it is all something they look at us and they get mad at us and they're blaming their suicidal ideations on us when we say, "Hey, it's not great." Matter of fact, it's wrong. You've exchanged the glory of the immortal God for all this other stuff. God has turned you over to it



and it's wrong. They're not suicidal because we're telling them this in these little churches and pockets around the country. They're feeling the suicidal ideations because they are idolaters. That's the bottom line.

Let me prove that to you. Go to Deuteronomy 28. Deuteronomy 28. The reason there is a hopelessness is because it comes along with worshiping idols. You worship other stuff. You want to find something other than God and the pathway that he's laid out for us, then you will find it is bankrupt and you will bankrupt yourself in this. And I mean that on a personal level of your emotions and feelings. I'm starting to preach at this point. Go down the bottom of this, verse 64. He gives blessings for obedience and he says, if you start to pattern yourself after the culture and you start doing what they do and you start bowing down to idols of wood and stone, I'm going to give you over to that and you going to find that's what you're doing in verse 64. You're going to be "scattered" and you going to keep doing what got you into this mess in the first place. "And there you're going to serve your gods of wood and stone."

Which, by the way, you didn't know that when you came in, right? You were serving the real God and your fathers didn't know, that's not what they did. But now that's what you're doing. "And among these nations," here's the deal, you are going to realize it's a bankrupt thing to be an idolater. "You find no respite," no peace. "There should be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you," here's what you can have inside, "a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul." Do you want to describe the bankruptcy, even of modern idolatry, as people say, "This will give me purpose, this will give me peace"?

Here's what it brings you "a trembling heart, failing eyes and a languishing soul." It's the payment of your chasing idolatry. "Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and you shall have no assurance of your life. In the morning you'll say, 'If only it were evening!' In the evening you'll say, 'If only were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes will see." The reality of this all is that you will chase something that tries to give you peace and you'll recognize that it does not. Jesus said, I can give you peace. I give peace. "I will give you peace, but not as the world gives," because the peace of the world leads to nothing, because all they are going to do is give you other stuff.

It started in the Garden. The creature telling God's dominion captains of the earth, "Hey, do this and you will have something as you become the purposed beneficiary of this stuff." That's called idolatry and it ends in bankruptcy. It will end in you hiding and cowering in the corners of this creation as God approaches. You will be ashamed. You will have a trembling heart, failing eyes, languishing soul, hang in doubt. You will be in dread. No assurance of your life.

With all of that, our correction to a culture of idolaters, we think now within the church, here's what we should recognize. There's nothing better than responding to the cry of verse 28 in Acts 19. Go back to it. Acts 19 verse 28. "When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out." They cried, "I don't want to hear the possibility of you telling me that my life, I can't find purpose and protection and power and purpose and peace in all of this stuff. You're telling me that there's something else, that the greatness of the true God of the Bible and his



Son is the answer. We're going to just chant even louder, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'"  
No.

And this is where we're at, by the way, in our culture right now. The battle of ideas, this whole concept of Second Corinthians 10, of trying to tear down every lofty thought that raises itself up against the knowledge of Christ. We're saying, no, no, no, no. The greatness of God, this is it. This, by the way, as they yelled, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians," I just want to take us back to how this all began, verses 21 and 22. Paul is here resolving in the Spirit to pastor Macedonia and Achaia. Why? Well because he wants to strengthen the church there, just like he did on the second missionary journey after the first missionary journey. He wanted to strengthen the churches. And in the third missionary journey, on the second missionary journey, he had established churches, he wants to go and strengthen the churches.

Then he wants to go to Jerusalem, where he'll pick up some donations from them because there was a famine going on. We learn that elsewhere in the Bible. And he says, "After I've been there, I must also see Rome," because I really want to see the neat sights there and I'll bring my camera and binoculars. No, you're not talking about sightseeing. What do you want to go to Rome for? Read the book of Romans. He wants to go and benefit them spiritually. He wants to preach the gospel to them. He wants to build up the Church. "And having sent into Macedonia," ahead of him going to Macedonia, "two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while." Why did he stay in Asia? Why did he send those guys? Why? Because he wanted to proclaim the greatness of the only God who is great. That's the whole point.

Number two on your outline. That's our job. To "Clarify the Exclusive Greatness of God." And it isn't a college degree. And it's not a bank account. And it's not an alarm system. And it's not your path to success. And it's not something that you think is going to bring you peace because you've been self-actualized. There's only one thing that's great and worth pursuing. I mean, when it really comes down to it, there's one. And that word exclusive is a strategic word in this passage, exclusive greatness. And I mean that because when Matthew 19, someone came to Jesus and said, "Hey, good teacher," what did Jesus say? Only one good. "No one's good but God alone."

Now, I know that's a categorically, you know, profound statement, but he means it in an absolute sense. There is no one good but God alone. Of course he is his son. "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father," right? This is the Son of God. Of course he's trying to get advice, the rich young ruler, from Jesus about eternal life. He wants to make sure we clarify who you're talking to here. Not to mention that the God of the universe is the exclusively Holy God, and that Triune God is the only exclusive great one. And everything else in categorical difference and by distinction is not great. Including Artemis. Including Ivy League schools. Including the high rises in Southern California. Including the best house in the best neighborhood in South Orange County. Nothing is great compared to him. And so we are proclaiming the greatness of God.



Now, is there a problem with going to a nice school? No. Is there a problem...? No. There's nothing wrong with you driving a nice car. There's nothing wrong with those things as long as we realize that's not greatness. You got to know that. And if it's become an idol, then it does need to be deposed. We need to depose the magnificence of the thing you're trusting in. Because that's what idols are. It's the other stuff that becomes a trust magnet. It becomes a loyalty magnet. It becomes I got to have it and if I don't, I'm in trouble. I have to have it. That's the problem. And our job is to remember the exclusive greatness of God because there is only one good God.

Every good and perfect gift comes from the only good one. There's no rain falling on the crops, to quote Matthew Chapter 5, unless God, the good God provides it generously. He causes his rains to fall on the fields of the just and the unjust. God is the giver of all good things because there's only one good. There's only one eternal one. Where did you come from? How long have you been here? You really have only any dominion because it's all derived. You have only any glory because it's derived. You only need greatness because it's derived. Can God call Noah good, Daniel good, Abraham good? He can call them that and they have some goodness, but it's all derivative goodness. And that's my point. We should care about the source of all good things, and that's the God who exists. And that's your purpose.

Three categories. There's you and there's God. Can you be focused on him? Can you trust in him for everything from protection to peace and say, "That's my goal, that's my focus." The other stuff, utilize it. Commodities. Great. Don't ever let it get in the way of you and God. And what we're telling the lost world is you're trusting in something I know you think is great. You're saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Fill it in with whatever modern commodity you want, whatever modern thing you can see, no matter what. They're saying this is great. And we're saying, "I hate to tell you, but it isn't great because there's only one who is great." And our job is to proclaim the greatness. You got to remember that, first of all and you have to believe it.

I mean, Christians have to get back to saying, "Oh, yeah, that's right. I don't want to be fooled." You don't want to be the settlers in Canaan starting to believe what the Canaanites are saying. And you're surrounded by them. They're all idolaters. All of them are idolaters. By nature they are idolaters. You're the only person that should be distinctly a person who says, "My goal is to have the purposed beneficiary, the glory of God." All dominion, all power, all glory, all honor, all riches all go to him. My job is to bring him glory. That's real Christianity.

This isn't going to go well in terms of easy, at least. Talk to Elijah. But even when he wins the battle with the foreigner, fifty prophets of Baal, idolaters don't like giving up their idolatry, particularly those who are prophets of the idol. We have trouble. That's why we need weapons for the right hand and the left, to keep quoting Second Corinthians. We need to tear down the lofty ideas and it's going to be a battle, a battle of ideas. But it's a good thing. To clarify the exclusive greatness of God should be a joy-filled thing because it's the right thing, it's the good thing and we're really introducing people to something that's going to take them off a pathway of bankruptcy and nothing but dread and nothing but emptiness. At the end,





they will say vanity of vanities, it was all a waste of time. We want to get them on a path of righteousness.

It's a narrow path. It's a hard path, but it's the right path. Sitting in the ark and waiting to be delivered, it may not be as comfortable as living in the sprawling mansion there in Genesis 6, but I'll tell you what, it's the right place to be and you need to be reconciled with God and join us there. And the way we do that is by proclaiming the exclusive greatness of God.

Let me end with this passage. Go with me to Psalm 96, Psalm 96. It's a joyful declaration. It's something you should not be ashamed of. Because you're right. "One day every knee will be bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord." You will be vindicated if you ever proclaim in your circle of influence the exclusive greatness of God. Nothing else is great by comparison.

Look at verse 3, Psalm 96. Here's your job description for the week. Ready? For the rest of your life. "Declare his glory," his greatness, the weightiness, the importance, the comparative like absolute everything is great. Every nation, it's like dust on the scales. But "declare that glory among the nations," not just in the walls of the church, declare "his marvelous works," let's start with creation, "among all the peoples!" "Well, they're going to mock me." They might, but they're wrong. Why? Because "great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above," all the idols, "all the gods," everything else that people are going after. Because "all the gods of the people," verse 5, "are worthless idols."

But by comparison what are you proclaiming? The real God. The Lord who made the heavens. "Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." Which, by the way, now the sanctuary of God is not some presence focalized in Jerusalem. The Bible says in two ways it's put this way in First Corinthians, "that we are the temple of God," corporately the Church and that we individually, as we go off to work, we go off to the marketplace we are the temple, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Both of these are described in Scripture theologically, we as the Church. It's put that way in Ephesians Chapter 2, we are the building of God in which God dwells. The glory of God is here. The truth of God is here. "Splendor and glory, majesty, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary."

So what are we doing? We're to ascribe to the Lord, and we ought to be telling people to ascribe, which is to credit and give him the worth of that, that we're saying it's true. "Ascribed to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Ascribed to the Lord glory and strength." We're telling the world you should give credit to God because he's the only great one. His path is the only great one. "Ascribed to the Lord the glory that it's due his name," which will take the rest of your life to continue to do. "Bring an offering," serve him, sacrifice, "and come into his courts, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." You should care about how you live. "Tremble before him, all the earth." We should tell the earth he is coming to judge. He reigns, but he'll judge. Verse 10, "Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.'" He's in charge. And it extolls the name of his ark, of his Son, of his means of salvation.



"Yes, the world is established; it will never be moved." Which, by the way, is not a statement about the enduring eternal nature of the planet. Later in the Psalms, it goes on to say, keep reading, it's like a garment. God will roll it up and cast it off. It's not permanent, it's not eternal. But the world can't move it. Remember that in Isaiah 40, God can take the coast and it's like dust, he can just move the coast, right? We can't move the coast. We can't do that. In that sense, to you, to the world, the peoples, the families of the peoples, the world is established, it will never be moved. You can't move it.

But "God is going to judge the peoples with equity." The Lord reigns. He's going to judge. "Let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice, let the sea roar and all that fills it; let the fields exalt and everything in it. And then all the trees of the forest shall sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, he will come to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, the people's in faithfulness." It's like you sitting on the ark and calling people to say, "Get a seat in this thing."

How's it going with people? It's not going well. But the good news is that we are commissioned to go and tell them here is the answer and here is the greatness of God. And I know you sit there and you chafe at that. "I'm going to tell someone this thing is great and they're going to go say it ain't great. Who are you to say that?" Well, listen, if you're out here in the patio and some little kid is about to put a donut hole in his mouth and it's got maggots and flies all over it and he's about to eat it, if you stop him I'm going to praise you for that. I'm not going to say who are you to tell some congregant's kid, that's not your kid. Why would you get involved in that? Right?

Here's the deal. If you see someone eating rocks or dirt or maggots, I think you should have the right to intervene. And your neighbors and your friends and your coworkers and your extended family members, they're idolaters, and they're eating dirt, you understand? And we're saying the greatness of God.

There is something so much better. He's called the Bread of Life. He's the fountain of living water, as not only Jesus said in the gospel of John, but God, the Triune God is described that way in Jeremiah Chapter 2, he's the spring of living water, the fountain of living water, and we're out here digging holes that can hold no water. And we think we found something. Well, that's vanity of vanity, all that. It's called other stuff that you're putting in front of you, trying to make you the beneficiary. It's called idolatry. And our culture is filled with idolaters, even if you don't know anyone bowing down to a shrine. Our job is to declare the greatness of God. Verse 3 again, do you still got that passage open? Let's end with these words ringing in your ears. "Declare his glory among the nations."

Let's pray. God, hard culture for us to proclaim the greatness that you have clearly demonstrated not only in your word, but in history and conscience. We see it all over the place that you are God. Your glory is reflected in all the earth to quote Isaiah 6. And we know that one day you will take your great power and your glory will begin to reign. The kingdoms of the world and all their splendor and glory will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And we want to prepare people for that by pointing them to this answer. Which is an



ark that God has provided, a payment for sins in a cross 2,000 years ago, a seat that's available, a door that's open, because in a day when it gets to the place where wickedness is great on the earth and we're getting there quickly, where every thought and intention of the heart is only evil continually, God, we know you're going to step in and fix the problem. But we want the door before it slams shut to have a few of our neighbors and friends and family members join us in seeing the greatness of God and the glory of Christ. So help us in that endeavor, even this week, as we understand in wisdom and maturity the idols of our culture.

In Jesus name, Amen.