

31. The Real Danger of Radical Christianity

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 19, page 928 in our Church Bibles. A passage all about the real danger of radical Christianity.

I want to ask a question to begin with this morning. Is the Christian faith a danger to the public, to our society, to our culture?

Even to our world. So dangerous, in fact, that it must be controlled, that it must be legislated against, or even suppressed. Well, there are many people today, clearly, who think that that is so. If, like me, you receive the regular emails from the Barnabas Fund, you'll have read this week's update telling us about a Chinese pastor who just was recently imprisoned for 15 years in Xinjiang province, for, quote, endangering the security of the state.

What was he doing? Quote, preaching Christianity among the peoples of Uyghur. More close to home, we've seen more and more legislation pushed through by this present government which seeks to dismantle our nation's Christian heritage, piece by piece.

[1 : 21] It seems that politicians like Harriet Harman seem to be particularly dedicated to that agenda and told that in Westminster it's known as the harmonization of society.

It seems that she and others want to make it a crime, if possible, for Christians even to articulate disagreement about certain sexual freedoms or even a crime to refuse to promote forms of alternative sexuality, for example, in schools.

Richard Dawkins, likewise, along with others, campaigns, doesn't he, to protect our children in schools from the danger, the danger that Christians pose?

Should they dare, for example, to mention God? Should they dare to question current evolutionary orthodoxy? Well, it's interesting, isn't it? I don't know if you heard on the radio this week that some fossil discovery in Poland has apparently totally set back the evolutionary timetable proposed by a mere 18 million years.

That seems rather a radical shift to me, but I didn't hear anybody saying, well, perhaps this theory isn't quite as watertight as we thought it was. That's by the by. Just the other week you may have read of another teacher who was sacked instantly.

[2 : 45] Why? Because dangerously she asked a pupil who was ill if she might pray for her. Such was the real and present danger to her life, obviously, by that shocking suggestion that she was instantly dismissed.

So, Christianity seems to be seen increasingly in our culture as a very dangerous thing, especially radical, zealous, keen Christianity.

Fundamentalism, as the media likes to call it. I saw a newspaper headline recently, which was headed thus, The Worldwide Danger of Religious Fundamentalism.

And I read another article just a week or two ago about the trial of that Turkish father who was imprisoned for the honour killing of his daughter. And in several places in the article, it said, these things are much more common in Britain today because of the rise of religious fundamentalism in Britain today.

Notice, by the way, there, the terminology. There's a very subtle shift in our language has taken place there, hasn't it?

[3 : 55] I think I've mentioned this before. From an adjective to a noun. It used to be, not that long ago, you would talk about Christianity. That's the noun. There may have been adjectives attached to that.

Orthodox Christianity. Liberal Christianity. Or perhaps fundamentalist Christianity. But do you notice now how the adjective has shifted and become the noun? Fundamentalist is the noun.

It's one group. It's one class. There might be different versions of it. There might be Muslim fundamentalists and Christian fundamentalists. But the point is, they're all fundamentalists. Fundamentally, they're all the same. And the implication is, they're all very dangerous. Fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are people who blow up planes. Fundamentalists are people who have suicide bombs. They're all fundamentalists. And my goodness, we must be opposed today in society to all kinds of fundamentalist religion.

Well, I want to ask again, is that so? Is there a danger to the world from radical, committed, zealous Christianity and Christian churches and Christian evangelism? Actually, that was the very same question, which was a live one in the first century, in the Roman world, in the Roman Empire.

[5 : 10] Many people, no doubt, like Theophilus, to whom this book of Acts is addressed, a Christian, probably a Roman official of some kind, no doubt people like him face that very question a very great deal of the time.

And so Luke tells us that he wrote this orderly account, the facts of actually what happened, the reality of apostolic Christianity, to give people like Theophilus certainty and to give them reassurance.

And to allow reasonable, unprejudiced people to make a reasoned judgment of their own as to whether Christianity was, as was often claimed, a danger, a force for evil in the empire and in the world, and not a force for good.

And that's what this passage before us is all about. So what light does it shed then on the truth of this claim that Demetrius makes in verse 27, that there is great danger to society and to culture by the persuasiveness of Paul's gospel?

What light is shed by the facts recorded for us here about the key events and the key players in this great disturbance that took place in Ephesus about the way, the way of the Christian faith?

[6 : 25] Well, let's look at what Luke records for us in these three sections. In the resolve, exemplified by Paul in verses 21 and 22. In the rage, engineered by Demetrius in the next section.

And then finally, in the ruling expressed by the town clerk from verse 35. What is the evidence for these claims about the danger of this radical message of Christ that it presents to the world of commerce, the world of culture?

Whether we're talking about ancient Ephesus in the first century, or whether we're talking about modern Europe today. Well, look at verse 21 and 22 first. Don't miss the visionary resolve exemplified by Paul here.

What Paul exhibits here is the real way of witness to Christ. And it is a way of total self-giving to the world for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

It involves great personal cost, great rejection by the world, and indeed by Paul's own people. But the apostle of Christ, we learn in these verses, is willing to surrender everything gladly and to give even his own life for the blessing and the salvation of others.

[7 : 41] Verse 21 says, Paul resolved in the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit, to go to Jerusalem, saying, I must also see Rome.

Now what Luke is meaning us to see here is that this marks a major turning point in Paul's story. Since chapter 13 of Acts, the whole story has been about his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles seeks to fulfill the great commission of Christ, that the gospel should go from Jerusalem to Samaria, to the very ends of the earth.

And this is the beginning of his last great journey, the journey to Rome, to the very center of the ancient world, to the center of the empire. All roads led to Rome, and all roads led from Rome. So the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles must, he says, get to Rome. And he desires that, absolutely at one with the desire of the Spirit of Christ.

He resolved in the Spirit. It must be so. I must go to Rome. If you read through Luke's writing, in Luke's Gospel and in Acts, you'll find that in many places that word occurs, must, certain things must happen, that the story of Jesus will be fulfilled, that God's sovereign purpose will unfold according to plan.

[9 : 06] And so the rest of the story narrates this great journey to Rome and all its consequences. Now Paul, as we read on in the story, it becomes clear to us that Paul is under no illusion as to what this journey is going to be like.

The Spirit who compels him and tells him he must go to Rome also informs him all too clearly what that will mean. So in chapter 20, verse 22, Paul says, the Holy Spirit testifies that in every city

affliction and imprisonments await me.

And in chapter 21, verse 4, because of that, the people are begging him, the disciples are begging him not to go to Jerusalem. And Paul says, no, what are you doing? I'm ready not only to be imprisoned, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when you remember that the Acts of the Apostles is part two of Luke's book and that Luke's gospel is the first part of it, then we can't help, surely, but noticing something here.

An extraordinary parallel that is quite deliberate from Luke's pen with the story of Jesus himself.

The great hinge point in Luke's gospel occurs when Jesus, in chapter 9, verse 51, says himself, he sets his face firmly to go to Jerusalem.

[10 : 27] And all the rest of Luke's gospel tells of Jesus' great journey to Jerusalem and to his death on the cross and to all the consequences that are going to happen. In Luke chapter 13, the people say the same thing to Jesus.

Get away from here, say some of the Pharisees who are following him, because Herod wants to kill you. And Jesus says, no, I must go my way. He's constantly saying that.

The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise. You see what Jesus says in his ministry, that there may be a winning of salvation, that there may be forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, a rescue from the wrath to come, that there may be the winning of that salvation, I must go to Jerusalem and die.

And says Paul, that there may be witness to that great salvation. I must go to Jerusalem and face suffering and even death, that the gospel may reach all the world.

That's the real way of witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Very striking, isn't it, when you get Luke's drift? And so Paul resolved, led by the Holy Spirit, to follow this radical path of zealous devotion to Jesus.

[11 : 56] Here is a man, we might say, who has been radicalized in his religion. Determinedly set on a road that will lead ultimately only to one place, and that is to martyrdom.

Now those terms tend to strike fear into people's ears today, don't they? It conjures up visions of bombers and terrorism, crashing airplanes.

But look beyond all of that rhetoric to the facts of this radical Christian way. This radical road is a road of radical love, not of radical hate, of love for Jesus, and therefore love for the whole world. It's a road of witness that leads to denial of self for the salvation of others, not the destruction of others, for the protection, the promotion of self, your ideals.

This man must see the gospel of redeeming love reach the ends of the earth, but he knows that that road will inevitably lead him through Jerusalem, through the way of rejection, the way of opposition, the way of great cost, just as it did for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 12] And so he is resolved, I must go that way. The real way of witness to Jesus Christ. So I ask, is that way a danger to our society, to our world?

Well, helped by Demetrius the silversmith, the Ephesian populace certainly thought so. Look at verses 23 to 34 and the violent rage engineered by Demetrius.

What Demetrius stirs up the crowd to express is the real way of the world, whether it's the 1st century or the 21st century or any century. And that is that this world will always be resolved to preserve its ways and practices and cherished idols, however irrational and unjust its actions may be.

Preserve it against the persuasive truth of the gospel of Christ and against those who would seek to persuade others to Christ. And powerful vested interests will always manipulate the majority into colluding with them against those who in fact are only seeking their good and their very best.

They're just seeking their liberation from bondage to the fear and the darkness and the superstition and the exploitation of the world's idolatry. What's significant here in this passage I think is both clarity and confusion about the gospel work together to foment this vociferous opposition to the gospel of Christ and to those who spread that gospel.

[14 : 53] The picture painted of this riot that broke out in Ephesus and in the great theater is it's one of total confusion. By the way, that theater was a vast place. It was a place that seated some 25 to 30,000 people.

So just imagine a place the size of Ibrox filled with wild screaming and chanting. That's what it was like. In fact, if you've been to Ibrox you don't have to imagine it. That is what it's like actually.

Confusion reigned, verse 29.

The city was filled with confusion. Verse 32. The assembly was filled with confusion. A crowd stirred up with rage and was shouting and bawling.

Very frightening. Think of some of those scenes of these raging, rioting protests that we sometimes see from the Middle East today.

Total popular confusion and yet, behind it, very sinister clarity is clearly in evidence, isn't it? Verse 27. Demetrius is very clear about what this man's message means.

[16:02] It is a danger, he says. A clear and present danger to us all. To what in particular is it a danger? Well, says Demetrius, to our trade and to our temple.

That is, it is a threat both to our wealth and to our worship. It's a challenge both to our pockets and, this is very important, a curb also on our passions.

How is that so? Well, first of all, take the threat to their trade and their wealth. Look back to verse 19. Ephesus was the religious capital of Asia. The temple of Artemis was one of the wonders of the world.

It was a huge place and the paraphernalia surrounding that temple was also huge as was the whole economy that surrounded it. And that trade was threatened clearly by this newfound Christian faith. Paul had persuaded many and they had turned away, said Demetrius, really turned away from their life of pagan, idolatrous nonsense.

[17:09] Verse 19 tells us that Christian believers had burned all their pagan books and things. 50,000 pieces of silver worth. Millions and millions of pounds, that is, in our money.

They burned them and what's more they wouldn't be buying any more. Or any silver shrines of Artemis or any other pagan produce either. Demetrius was no fool.

He saw what that meant. This is our livelihood at stake here, men, he says. And we must act immediately to stop this in its tracks. As one writer puts it, a spiritual movement that led to the burning of sorcerer's books was bound to cause reaction.

As long as religion remains in the cloister, it'll be tolerated and even smiled at. But when it comes out into the world and upsets the economics of society, all hell breaks loose.

When the gospel presumes to challenge vested interests of whatever kinds, either in business or in personal life, trouble always lies ahead. And always it's been so.

[18:14] If you look back and read the history of the post-reformation times in Scotland of great spiritual awakening, who were the great opponents of all that went on? Well, it was the tavern keepers and the brothel keepers, of course.

Because they lost their trade. Look back to the history of the missionary movements in Africa, for example, in particular. And you'll find that the colonialist traders hated the missionaries.

A lot of nonsense talk today about Christian missionaries just being exploitative and riding on the back of colonialism. The truth is precisely the opposite. The colonialists, by and large, hated the missionaries.

Why did they hate them? Because they impaired their exploitative trade of the Africans. Because they educated them. They taught them a better way through Jesus Christ and they wouldn't be taken in by these unscrupulous Europeans.

Our prosperity is in danger. If, you see, verse 26, people become persuaded that the whole basis of our trade, the whole cultural worldview that we live by, our slavery to these man-made gods, that that's all wrong, well, heaven help us.

[19:27] All our wealth will disappear. A real and present danger to our trade. But I suspect that your average Joe Bloggs in Ephesus wasn't all that concerned about wealthy businessmen losing their bonuses any more than Joe Bloggs today cares about wealthy bankers losing their bonuses.

And Demetrius is no fool so he takes a rather different tack with the crowd in general. He focuses now not so much on the trade but shifts his ground to the temple, to the very heart of that shared culture of Ephesian society.

He's playing here on popular sentiment, the popular mood. No doubt part of it was the pride and the prestige that the people had for their temple, their superior goddess and culture and so on.

Not just Asia, all the world worship her. People can be very attached, can't they, to their shared values. They think their own ways are so superior.

We're like that in the West today, aren't we? We value these things of democracy and tolerance.

We want to import them to all the rest of the world although it was a given that it was far better for everybody else to have the same values as us.

[20 : 43] The West is actually very proud and superior. And it's interesting, isn't it, that we so worship the goddess of tolerance in our society today that we simply will not tolerate anything else. It's really quite ironic. But you know, there's more to this here in Ephesus, I think, than just pride and prestige. Remember what this worship, remember what this cultural homage in Ephesus was all centered on.

It was all centered on sex and eroticism. On the celebration of the carnal and essential Artemis, or Diana, as the Romans called her, is the fertility goddess.

The statues of her show her with multiple breasts. Her temple was a sex temple. Her worship, as Howard Marshall, the scholar tells us, was celebrated with wild orgies and carousing.

That's the temple that was in danger. That's the worship that was under threat. That's the cherished culture that was being challenged by Paul's gospel.

[21 : 52] Very directly by men who were persuading others that all such idolatry was nothing. That all such gods were nothing.

And therefore, all their justification for this wonderfully indulgent sexual license in the name of religion was totally removed. That is certainly something to make the average red-blooded Ephesian male wake up and smell the coffee, don't you think?

Here's a gospel that was teaching people to say no to all sexual immorality. that demanded faithfulness and fidelity and marriage that exposes all justification for that kind of loose lifestyle as being truly morally and spiritually bankrupt.

No wonder then that when they heard that sort of thing the crowd were quick to start shouting, great is Artemis of the Ephesians, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. I guess in today's language it would be something like this, it's my body, I'll do what I want with it.

No to Artemis phobia. Yes to Ephesian pride. They'd all be marching with big banners and all sorts of colourful clothes I'm sure. I don't think there can be any doubt that this was an aspect of the hostility faced by the early church, this threat to license and free sexual expression.

[23 : 26] To turn from idolatry meant a radical turning away from that sexual license which was so idolized right across that pagan culture. Now we saw that already back in Acts chapter 15 didn't we?

The very heart of that declaration of the Jerusalem council. Gentiles who came to faith did not have to become Jews, absolutely not. But they did have to turn away wholly from all idolatry. idolatry and from all the trappings of idolatry, particularly sexual immorality. And all through the New Testament these things are so closely intertwined as to be inseparable.

And we know for sure that Paul did not compromise one iota on that in his preaching in Ephesus. In fact, just listen to some words that he wrote just a few years later on to that church in Ephesus, Ephesians 5 verse 5.

You may be sure of this, he says, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is, an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ.

[24 : 35] That was what Paul was preaching. And it was turning away from that whole way of life that was inevitable when people were persuaded that all pagan idolatry was just man-made.

that all such philosophy of life and culture is just a covert excuse to live as you please, indulging your lust for your possessions and equally for your passions.

So Demetrius had great clarity about the gospel. He knew that it was a very major threat that could cause the collapse of that whole decadent and indulgent way of life that they so enjoyed.

Notice what Demetrius does not do, by the way. The one thing he doesn't do is address the argument. He does not seek to find out if this message Paul preaches is actually true.

Far from it. As John Calvin comments, blinded by his passion, he is driven to destroy the true teaching. He starts up a riot.

[25 : 46] He plays the popular concerns. He stirs up shouting and self-assertion. And fueled by all that confusion, they end up, says verse 32, in the theatre.

Most of them don't even know why they're there. Alexander is put up to speak by some, perhaps to try and disassociate the Jews from these troublesome Christians, but at any rate, he doesn't get to speak.

He's drowned out by hours and hours of shouting. One writer says the only thing heathenism can do against Paul and his gospel is to shout itself hoarse.

Very striking, isn't it? But isn't that still the way of the world today? Again, in the Barnabas Fund News, there was a report about how the government in the Indian state of Karnataka is desperately trying to introduce anti-conversion laws.

It doesn't want to engage with the truth, it wants to shut it down. That's what Richard Dawkins wants in schools, isn't it? Don't let the word God, don't let the word creation even be mentioned.

[26 : 50] There's danger. Don't engage with it. Just shout, Great is Darwin of the scientists. That's their cry, isn't it? Just another version of Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Violent rage, sterner up by vested interests and endorsed by all who will not have their cherished way of life challenged by anyone, far less Jesus Christ.

Don't engage with the truth, shut it down. That's the way of the world. Notice the fact.

The genuine Christian way is the way of reasoned persuasion. Paul persuaded many people. engaged their minds in order to change their lives and their loyalties.

It's the world's defense that is the way of rancorous protest. We use words to win people, not weapons to wound people. We seek to convince people, not to coerce people.

[28 : 02] It is the opposers of the Christian gospel who do these other things. But the gospel word is powerful, verse 27.

It persuaded many. Our weapons as Christians are not the weapons of worldly warfare, but as Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10, they are powerful to the breaking down of strongholds of resistance against the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the gospel word is rightly feared. And that's why it will always bring forth vehement opposition and loud and violent protest, whether in Ephesus in the first century or in Europe in the 21st.

But an honest assessment must concede the truth. And that's what Luke records for us in verses 35 to 41 in the vindicating ruling expressed by the town clerk.

Because what he exhibits to us is the real way of wisdom. For any honest person who's seeking the truth. Now of course, the town clerk was not himself a totally disinterested party.

[29 : 12] He's a politician and he's got his own vested interests at heart, no doubt. The Greek cities, you see, even in the Roman Empire, possessed this demos, this citizens' democratic assembly, you might call it.

Now the Romans didn't like them. They were always looking for excuses to try and shut them down. And of course, once politicians have got their own devolved assemblies, there's nothing they'll do to let go of them, is there?

Some might say alas to that. But this town clerk, he's a key figure in that assembly, he is not going to have his role and his assembly put at risk. And this riotous, irregular assembly, if it got to the ears of the Romans, might do just exactly that, give them the excuse they want to shut it down.

So he's got every reason to try and quieten all this down. But he was wise enough to see, wasn't he, that all these allegations have absolutely no basis in fact.

And that the Christian message was of itself absolutely no danger to public order. Rather, he saw that the danger came from the hostile response of the crowd.

[30 : 22] Verse 40, we are the ones in danger of being charged with rioting, he says. So like a typical diplomat, he smooths everything over, he flatters their pride.

Verse 35, all the world knows how great Ephesus is, and how great our goddess is, there's no need to be defensive. But he also does clearly point out, doesn't he, that the Christians have done nothing worthy of censure, either in their conduct or behavior or anything else.

They're not, verse 37, gratuitously offensive. They're not sacrilegious or blasphemous people. And he says, verse 38, look, there is a rule of law in this city.

So let cool legal process take its course. Look at verse 40, again, he's very clear, isn't he? There is no cause we can give to justify this commotion.

We are the ones who are in the wrong here, these Christians are in the right. And notice, the clerk also did not engage with the truth of the gospel argument either.

[31 : 33] But he couldn't deny their exemplary behavior. And that actually is just one example of the importance, isn't it, of adorning the gospel message by our manner.

We were looking at that just a few weeks ago. Remember Titus 3, verse 8? In teaching, it showed dignity, integrity, sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

What is Luke, in this chapter, telling Theophilus and other decent, open-minded Romans who had heard much criticism of Christianity and its purported danger to society and culture?

Well, he's saying just this. Clear-thinking state authority will not fail to see that Christianity can stand up to the closest scrutiny.

Its behaviour is not seditious, quite the reverse. It is civil, it's honest, it's good. And the way of wisdom will be to say there is no cause for mindless opposition to this faith, or less suppression of it.

[32 : 43] Rather, let's hear the message that these people bring with such dignity and integrity. Let's listen to what these men are trying to tell us at great personal cost to themselves.

And friends, Luke's message to all decent fair-minded people today is just the same about the Christian faith. Look at the evidence, he says. Look at Paul's visionary resolve to face pain and loss all for his love for Christ and for the world.

Is that a wicked thing to be deplored? Look at the violent rage that so often marks the world's response to Christ and his message then and today. Is that irrational wrath admirable?

Something that's worthy in your eyes? Look at the wise-time clerk and his vindicating ruling. Isn't his rational sanity worth noting here?

Well, if you're somebody who's investigating the Christian faith, you must decide for yourself. Let me return to that question that I began with. Is radical, committed, apostolic Christianity, evangelical Christianity, is it dangerous?

[34 : 01] Is it a threat to our society, to our culture, to our world? Well, the answer of this chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, absolutely not.

In terms of being a danger to peace and good order and law and goodness and true freedom in society. To know that, all we have to do is to see the kind of visionary resolve that Paul's gospel was and still is producing in people today who follow the way of Jesus.

Imagine a society where the majority of people, even all people perhaps, are persuaded to live resolved to radical self-giving, to radical self-sacrifice for others at great personal cost, determined that people should see the redeeming love of Jesus.

Imagine a world where no one lived by exploiting the credulous and the vulnerable and the superstitious, making money out of their folly and using them for gain, as these idol makers did then and as the idol makers do today, the fashion shapers of our culture.

A world where no one abused so-called art and culture just to indulge their own sexual gratification, along with huge profit. as the pimps and the multi-billion dollar pornographers and people traffickers do today.

[35 : 37] A society where there was such dangerous radicalism as a love for, horror of horrors, the Decalogue and the law of God.

Where people cherished reverence for God, respect for hard work and proper rest, for valuing marriage and family life, for delighting infidelity in marriage, not celebrating casual sex and infidelity. Where people were committed to a care for life, for honesty and truth and contentment, not greed at the cost of dishonesty and lies. people were committed to a marriage.

Imagine a society where, as Paul commands the Ephesian church leaders to do in Acts chapter 20, remember the weak and to remember Jesus' words that it's better to give than to receive.

Imagine that worldwide. The worldwide danger of religious fundamentalism. Not this kind.

[36 : 47] Not radical Christianity. The very opposite of danger for our world. It's what our world needs more than anything else at all. Don't you think?

So no, there's no danger to our world at all in that sense. Only sheer blessing for the Christian way. But there is a sense in which the answer is also absolutely yes, there is danger.

Radical Christianity is a danger to society, a real danger to everything that is rotten and corrupt and base and subhuman in our culture. Whether it hides under the guise of religion or of humanism or of philosophy, whether it's high culture or whether it's low brow customs.

Because the gospel of Jesus Christ does change culture. Where it changes people. Where it makes them turn away, as Demetrius saw with his own eyes.

Away from those who would exploit them for gain, financial or otherwise. Whether it's selling them charms they think will bring them good luck in life. Whether it's peddling superstition to the masses in the forms of horoscopes or lucky charms.

[38 : 08] Or whether it's peddling much more sophisticated superstition to the highbrow, through the self-help books and new age mumbo-jumbo or Scientology, whatever the latest fad is in Hollywood.

Away from the forlorn hope of the lotteries or of talent shows or of the betting shop or of the drug pusher on the corner who promises bliss but only delivers bondage.

You'll have heard this week of these five deaths through anthrax among drug users. That's a pitiful parable, isn't it?

Anthrax is a disease of beasts. These poor people have been dehumanized and become beasts through these so-called saviors, these idols.

Yes, the message of Christ is a real danger for those who say from this business we have our wealth. Just as it's a danger to those who get their kudos and their cachet and their popularity in society by championing what we might call Ephesian worship culture that's all around us today.

[39 : 19] Worshipping at the shrine of the goddess of sex. Who is worshipped, yes, not just by Asia but all the world over. There is danger because the gospel rescues human beings from that kind of degrading and primitive slavery.

From that animal instinct. From that dehumanizing behavior. Because the gospel shows up, those who promote that, for what they are. Willing servants of gods of their own imagining.

Gods that are powerless to bring any happiness and joy to the lives and the relationships and the societies that we live in as a whole but very powerful in keeping them in wealth and in celebrity and in their status.

So yes, there is danger. Real danger in radical Christian faith. And in the real Christian message, there is danger for all that is false and all that is phony and all that is filthy in our society.

Ironic, isn't it? Their fear, the great sex goddess worshipped not only by Asia but all the world, that she might be deposed from her magnificence. By what?

[40 : 36] by the mere persuasion of the truth that is in Jesus. The truth that can set people free even, yes, from the gods that are worshipped all the world over.

They are all vulnerable to that gospel. The false religion of man, the false culture of man, the false philosophies of man. All gods made with hands which are no gods at all.

They are all vulnerable. And friends, that is why there will always be in every place vehement opposition to this gospel of Christ.

Not engagement with the gospel, that's far, far too dangerous. But open enmity. It must be silenced, it must be shouted down.

Real Christianity will always, always produce no little disturbance when it confronts the world, when it confronts its trade and its temple. Let me end by saying this.

[41 : 44] So also it will always be when it confronts your life. Because the real gospel of Jesus is dangerous to your personal life too, to your trade and your temple, to your wealth and your worship, to your prosperity and passions.

And we know that. When someone hears and begins to understand the gospel of Jesus, it always causes a riot of defense inside them. This is dangerous to me.

This is dangerous to my prosperity, to my way of life, to the things I love to do, to the relationships I want to have. This will rob me of my trade and temple if I follow it wholeheartedly. Yes, it will.

You're right. There's danger. Danger in this book. Danger in this church. Danger in this message. And yet it is a message of destiny. This gospel is calling you also, as it called Paul, to a great journey. A journey to glory, but must go by Jerusalem, by the way of the cross.

[43 : 09] Because to be persuaded, friends, is to be turned away, once and for all. From all your idols. From all you live for.

From all that gives you prosperity. From all that may satisfy your passions now. If God's calling you to turn away from all of that, and to him, and to his way, and let me tell you, he is today calling you to do exactly that.

Don't resist. Not any longer. Because the only real danger of radical Christianity for you is that you will resist it.

And that you'll let the day of your destiny pass you by. Don't do that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, your word is indeed to us and to our hearts as a hammer and as a fire. As it is to this, our whole world.

[44 : 28] Quell within us that right of opposition. And may every one of us here this day, having been persuaded of the truth that is in Jesus, turn, walk away from all that would hold us in the culture of our past, that we might be led by Jesus Christ in the way everlasting.

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