

Series: Acts
Title: Refining Fire
Scripture: Acts 19: 29-34
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Acts 19: 29: And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

Gaius and Aristarchus were believers. They were from the church in Macedonia. Paul's companions in travel. The Greeks caught these men. They rushed these two into the theater violently. They faced possible torture, even death.

Acts 19: 30: And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31: And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre

Paul was the apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul was willing to go into the theater where this riot was taking place. But in God's providence, Paul was held back by the brethren and other chief men of Asia who were friends with Paul. This saved Paul's life but it also gave Paul an opportunity to see what God does in trials without any assistance from man.

Gaius and Aristarchus were believers under the power and grace of God. These brethren were ready, not only to believe on Christ, but to suffer for Christ's sake.

Through this great trial, with no assistance from Paul, the Lord proved his grace sufficient to keep us. The Lord proved their faith to be persevering faith. We know they persevered in faith because they are mentioned again, very well spoken of by Paul.

Acts 20: 4: And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.

This proved an evident token of their salvation of God.

Philippians 1: 28: And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of Go

Acts 19: 33: And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

Alexander is a contrast to the faithfulness of Gaius and Aristarchus. Here is what we know about Alexander. *The Jews drew Alexander out of the multitude.* The word "drew" means he was "induced by persuasion." He had pressure from his Jewish kinsman to step forward.

And Alexander beckoned with the hand. This was a motion to get the peoples attention, to silence the crowd, so one could speak. Now, if the Jews were pushing him forward in anger, so that the mob would harm him then the Jews might have beckoned with the hand to point him out, but certainly Alexander would not have done so. But they persuaded Alexander to step forward and speak for them. So Alexander stepped forward and beckoned with the hand, to silence the people so he could speak.

Why would they choose Alexander? What would they use to persuade him to speak? It seems the key comes in Paul's second letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4: 14: Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: 15: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

Paul wrote this to Timothy who was at Ephesus at a later time, after this riot took place at Ephesus. Alexander the coppersmith, whom Paul warns Timothy to beware of, was at Ephesus. Now remember who started this riot? What was their argument?

Acts 19: 24: For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25: Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

The Jews probably choose Alexander because he was of like occupation and known by Demetrius and the men of that craft. (Acts 19: 34:...they knew that he was a Jew.) But there may be yet another reason the Jews persuaded Alexander. Alexander is mentioned in Paul's first letter, as someone who once professed Christ.

I Timothy 1: 18: This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19: Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

It may be that these Jews, wishing to cast the blame from themselves to Paul and the brethren who professed Christ, and thinking that Alexander might have some influence with men of like occupation, persuaded Alexander that if he did not try to make a defense for them then they would make it known to the Greeks that he was a professing Christian. Alexander would be persecuted by both Jews and Greeks. So, under this pressure, Alexander steps forward.

And would have made his defense unto the people. The Greek meaning is he "was about to apologize to the people". According to Paul, Alexander put away a "good conscience" and made a "shipwreck of faith, blaspheming God." Paul said, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil."

I. APART FROM THE GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO OPPOSE THE DEVIL OR TO MAINTAIN THE TRUTH.

Acts 19: 34: But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Someone wrote: The poor Jews had rejected the Saviour...Although enemies to the doctrine of Christ, yet they expected to be able to present amicably the doctrine of the one God. But, enemies to the grace of God and despised by men, all they could do was to excite the multitude to continue still longer their senseless and passionate cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

John 15:5: I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Demetrius tried without Christ—he profited nothing. Alexander tried without Christ—he profited nothing. The host of hell tried to do without Christ as he hung on the cross—their rebellion only accomplished the will of God. But with God all things are possible.

Psalm 57: 1: <<To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.>> Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast. 2: I will cry unto God

most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. 3: He shall send from heaven, and save me *from* the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah.

All grace is yours because of the triune God, manifest in Christ Jesus your Surety; all providence is for you because God works all things together on purpose for you, believer; all the work of the triune God, all the host of heaven's angels, is to keep you in Christ, because of the precious value of Christ's blood. God's very glory would be severed from God if you were severed from Christ. THAT SHALL NOT HAPPEN.

How hard we worked to give peace in our hearts! Still do at times. Yet, God merely speaks and there is peace!

APART FROM THE GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO OPPOSE THE DEVIL OR TO MAINTAIN THE TRUTH. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me.

II. TRIALS ARE OF GOD AND ARE NECESSARY.

This riot at Ephesus was a profitable riot for Paul and the brethren who were tried by it.

I Peter 1: 6: Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire,

The meaning of this phrase "manifold temptations" is afflictions and persecutions.

They are trials which God gives us to endure. God tried Abraham. God tried Job. In our text, God permitted wicked men to reproach and persecute his children, to injure their character, their persons and their property. Trials are by the will of God, who has appointed them. And they are good for us.

Your faith is much more precious than gold.

The gift of faith is more valuable than the gift of gold. Gold has no substantial value—it is worth more at times, less at times, gold will slip through your fingers. Faith is precious always, becomes more so, and remains with the believer throughout life.

The TRIAL of your faith much more precious than gold. A fire purges gold from its dross and makes gold shine brighter. So the fiery trial purges the dross of unbelief and makes our faith shine brighter before God and makes us to behold the faithfulness of Christ in whom we trust.

I Peter 1: 7: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9: Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls.

Trials are difficult. They cut against the grain of our fleshly wants. Yet, through trials, God makes the believer submit to God. He humbles us. He grows us in patience to wait on him. He weans us from this world and our own corruptions and conforms us to Christ.

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

When thru fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
They dross to consume and thy gold to refine

Apart from God we can do nothing. God gives us trials to keep us ever aware of this and trusting him alone.

III. THE LORD SEPARATES THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF.

Matthew 3: 11:...he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: **12: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

Illustration: Threshing wheat

Christ is the Great Divider

The Word, the Son of God, Christ Jesus the Lord, is the Cleanser, the Hewer, the Winnower.

Malachi 3: 2: But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. 4: Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. 5: And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. 6: For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Jeremiah 23:29: *Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*

Hebrews 4: 12: For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Christ the Word reveals the inner most heart of men.

The Word of sovereign election reveals the intents of the heart. God chose his Son, Christ Jesus. God chose whom he would in him. This doctrine of Christ declares the total inability, the total sin, the total ruin of all men without exception. Sinners either confess it is so and delight that God yet choose a people for himself or men deny their sin, exalt their will, and hate God for choosing to save a multitude from the fires of hell.

The Word of particular redemption by Christ. Christ shed his blood and redeemed the exact number of God's elect given him in covenant grace. He put away their sin. He made them the righteousness of God in him. That particular number, and that number alone, shall be called into his marvelous light. Until a man knows the depths of his sin, he will never rejoice in this Word of God's sure grace.

The Word of the new birth, the new creation, by God the Holy Spirit. No man can see, believe, walk, enter into the kingdom of Christ Jesus our King, until he is born of God the Holy Spirit. God does not reform the old. He makes men new creatures—creates a new nature—imparts a new spirit. Those born of God shall be kept and brought into the glory of God in eternity. Those born of God delight it is so. Those who insist that men are able by their will to come to Christ or by their will reject him manifest the intent of their hearts to exalt themselves as a god.

Some are separated out in this life as were the deceivers in our text.

The Jews were proven in this trial to be chaff. Alexander was. Demetrius and the host of idolaters were. But Paul, Gaius, Aristarchus, many of the brethren who risked their necks to hide Paul were proven to be wheat.

Proven Christ had purified them by his blood. By this, they were grown in grace and knowledge of God. Paul learned this:

I Corinthians 11: 19: For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Oh what a trial! What a sad day! It may be your dearest relations—a father, wife, brother or sister. It may be your closest friend. But God will manifest who are his and who is not.

1 John 2:19: They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Some tares are left to grow alongside the wheat until the end.

Matthew 13: 28: He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29: But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them....41: The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42: And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43: Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

God uses many enemies to provide for his beloved brethren. But it is ever so important for us to remember who separates the wheat from the tares. Alexander the coppersmith denied the Lord and eventually it was clear that he had to go. Paul put him out and warned Timothy about him. But who separated him? The Lord did. The Lord's fan is in his hand. Be patient. Wait on the Lord. Why are we to be so very careful to wait on the Lord? Remember the apostle Peter? We are apt to pull up the wheat like the apostle Peter and to keep the tares like Alexander (Luke 22: 31, 32.)

Without Christ we can do nothing. Trials are given by God and necessary to grow us in grace and dependence upon our Savior. It is the Lord who separates the wheat from the chaff.

AMEN!