When the Old Kingdom Fights Back

A companion devotional to Episode 4: "Kingdoms at War"

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:
This devotional accompanies Episode 4 of the *Kingdoms Collide Podcast* that explores 40 years of church in Ephesus. For the historical setting, narrative context, and complete story behind this devotional, listen to Episode 4: "Kingdoms at War"
You can listen and find more free resources at
www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-4

Read: Acts 19:23-41

The fire had gone out.

The magical books had become ash.

People had confessed.

Old practices had been abandoned.

The Word of the Lord was prevailing.

And then the old kingdom noticed.

Acts 19 does not move from repentance into peace.

It moves from repentance into resistance.

That matters.

We often imagine that once we finally obey Jesus, the battle should become easier.

We surrender the habit.

End the relationship.

Confess the secret.

Stop feeding the addiction.

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Change the spending pattern.

Leave the compromise.

And somewhere inside us, we expect obedience to create immediate relief.

Sometimes it does.

But sometimes the thing you stopped feeding begins fighting to keep its place in your life.

That is what begins happening in Ephesus.

The gospel has been changing people for years.

Paul has taught.

Disciples have formed.

The Word has spread.

People have begun abandoning magical practices.

And eventually changed belief begins producing changed behavior.

That behavior starts reaching the marketplace.

Acts introduces a silversmith named Demetrius.

His trade is connected to Artemis.

He gathers other craftsmen and begins with something everyone in the room understands:

<u>money.</u>

“This business” is where their wealth comes from.

That is revealing.

Before Demetrius talks about the greatness of Artemis, he talks about income.

The gospel has crossed a line.

It is no longer merely changing private opinions.

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People who once trusted Artemis are beginning to live as though they no longer need what Artemis promised.

And when people stop believing something, eventually they stop paying for it.

That is where allegiance becomes visible.

Faith eventually reaches the wallet.

The calendar.

The relationship.

The career.

The habits.

The entertainment.

The ambition.

The things we promote.

The things we refuse.

Jesus does not simply ask us what we believe while leaving every other part of life untouched.

If He is Lord, then eventually His lordship reaches everything.

That does not mean money, business, craftsmanship, or success are evil.

The problem in Ephesus was not that people had jobs.

The problem was that an entire economy had become intertwined with worship that competed with Jesus.

Demetrius understood what was happening.

Paul had not organized an attack against the craftsmen.

He had not led Christians into the market to smash silver shrines.

He had not burned the Temple of Artemis.

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He had done something far more disruptive.

He had preached Jesus.

Again.

And again.

And again.

And people had started believing him.

That belief created new questions.

If Jesus is Lord, why do I still need this charm?

If Jesus is Lord, why am I still paying for magical protection?

If Jesus is Lord, why am I bowing before something made by human hands?

If Jesus is Lord, why does this other thing still receive my deepest loyalty?

Those questions become decisions.

And decisions have consequences.

The scroll burns.

The shrine stays unsold.

The customer does not return.

The old kingdom begins losing what once sustained it.

That is when resistance grows.

Sometimes opposition is not evidence that faithfulness has failed.

Sometimes opposition appears because faithfulness has begun to matter.

That does not mean every difficulty is spiritual warfare.

It does not mean every person who disagrees with us is attacking God.

It does not give Christians permission to become suspicious, combative, or dramatic.

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But Acts 19 does remind us that allegiance has consequences.

When Jesus becomes Lord enough to change how we live, the things that benefited from our old allegiance may not release us quietly.

Demetrius takes economic fear and expands it.

First:

our wealth.

Then:

our trade.

Then:

our goddess.

Then:

our city.

Fear grows larger with every sentence.

And eventually fear becomes anger.

The craftsmen begin shouting:

“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

The crowd grows.

People pour into the streets.

Gaius and Aristarchus, companions of Paul, are seized and dragged into the theater.

Paul wants to enter.

His friends stop him.

Even influential provincial figures friendly toward Paul warn him not to go inside.

And then Acts gives us one of the most revealing descriptions of the whole riot.

Some people shouted one thing.

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Others shouted something else.

The assembly was confused.

And many did not even know why they were there.

That sounds remarkably modern.

Crowds can create certainty before individuals understand what they are certain about.

Fear spreads.

Anger spreads.

A label is attached.

Someone becomes the enemy.

Then contempt begins feeling righteous.

Before long, people who could not explain the issue are prepared to join the fight.

That is where this story turns toward us again.

Because when an old kingdom fights back, our greatest temptation may be to start fighting the wrong enemy.

Years later, Paul would write to this same church:

“our struggle is not against flesh and blood”.

Think about how difficult that would have been for the Ephesians to hear.

They had plenty of flesh and blood they could blame.

Demetrius.

The craftsmen.

People who had shouted in the theater.

People who had dragged their friends into danger.

People who had opposed the message.

People who had mocked.

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People who had threatened.

And Paul says:

they are not ultimately the enemy.

That does not mean their actions were acceptable.

It does not mean Christians should ignore injustice.

It does not mean boundaries are unspiritual.

It does not mean evil should be tolerated in the name of kindness.

Paul's friends physically prevent him from entering the theater.

The Asiarchs warn him away.

The city clerk uses legal and civic order to stop the riot.

Wisdom mattered.

Safety mattered.

Truth mattered.

But even while Christians resisted what was wrong, they were not called to surrender the humanity of the people opposing them.

Demetrius was still a man Christ could save.

The craftsmen were still people.

The confused crowd was still full of people.

People trapped inside the same loyalties the gospel was confronting.

That changes how Christians fight.

We tell the truth without dehumanizing people.

We resist evil without learning to love hatred.

We set boundaries without making contempt a spiritual gift.

We expose lies without forgetting that people believing those lies still bear God's image.

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We refuse compromise without forgetting that grace rescued us too.

Jesus demonstrated that kind of victory at the cross.

He did not call evil good.

He did not surrender the truth.

He did not pretend injustice was harmless.

Yet while His enemies crucified Him, He did not become like them.

The Kingdom of God defeats darkness differently.

It makes enemies into family through grace.

That is what had already happened in Ephesus.

The Christians themselves had once belonged to the world around them.

Some had practiced magic.

Some had trusted the same systems.

Some had participated in the same fears.

Some had needed the same mercy.

They were not people standing outside Ephesus congratulating themselves for being better than Ephesians.

They were Ephesians whom Jesus was rescuing.

That should humble us.

Because it is easy to recognize bondage in someone else and forget what Christ had to rescue us from.

And it is especially easy when their bondage begins costing us something.

The riot forces another question:

What happens when following Jesus becomes expensive?

Demetrius understood this issue immediately.

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“This business” provided their wealth.

That meant this was not a theoretical disagreement.

Families depended on the trade.

Workers depended on it.

Status was connected to it.

Security was connected to it.

Demetrius and the silversmiths felt the economic weight of the christians allegiance.

And for the new believers in Christ, following the direction Paul’s gospel was producing could cost something too.

That remains true.

Grace is free.

Jesus cannot be purchased.

We do not buy salvation through sacrifice.

Christ gave Himself for us while we were sinners.

<u>But receiving free grace does not mean obedience will always be inexpensive.</u>

Sometimes Jesus confronts something profitable.

A business practice built on dishonesty.

A career advantage purchased by silence.

A relationship that requires compromise.

A spending habit feeding something Christ is freeing us from.

An opportunity that demands we become someone Jesus is calling us not to be.

A source of income connected to harm.

A social identity that requires us to hate the people we are called to love.

The question becomes uncomfortable:

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What happens when obedience costs more than agreement?

It is easy to say Jesus is Lord when nothing else has to change.

Ephesus shows us something deeper.

When Jesus becomes Lord, old loyalties eventually become unnecessary.

And when old loyalties become unnecessary, the systems built around them begin feeling pressure.

That is why Demetrius is so important.

He reveals how quickly fear can disguise itself as self righteousness.

He begins with money.

Then he speaks about Artemis.

Then he speaks about her magnificence.

The fear becomes larger than lost sales.

Now it is identity.

Tradition.

Pride.

The city itself.

That pattern still appears in us.

Sometimes we say:

“I am defending what is right.”

But beneath the statement is:

“I am afraid of what this will cost me.”

Sometimes we say:

“This is about principle.”

And perhaps part of it is.

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But another part may be fear of losing control.

Influence.

Comfort.

Status.

Money.

Approval.

A familiar way of life.

The gospel does not merely expose the idols other people worship.

It exposes the reasons we defend our own.

And when those idols feel threatened, they can become loud.

For two hours the theater shouts:

“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Two hours.

The same declaration.

Again.

And again.

And again.

The volume is enormous.

But volume is not the same thing as truth.

A crowd can repeat something for hours and still be wrong.

A culture can normalize something for generations and still be wrong.

A belief can be profitable and still be wrong.

A tradition can be ancient and still be wrong.

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A majority can agree and still be wrong.

<u>The greatness of Jesus does not rise or fall with the volume of the theater.</u>

That matters because Christians can become frightened when the old kingdom gets loud.

We see opposition.

Mockery.

Political pressure.

Cultural resistance.

Economic pressure.

Social rejection.

And we begin believing that noise means the gospel is losing.

But look at Ephesus.

The theater is full.

Artemis has tens of thousands shouting her name.

Paul is outside.

The Christians are vulnerable.

From appearances alone, Artemis wins the afternoon.

And yet why is the city shouting?

Because people are leaving.

Because loyalties are shifting.

Because the gospel has become consequential enough to create resistance.

Sometimes the noise of the old kingdom is evidence that something underneath it is already shaking.

That does not mean we celebrate conflict.

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Paul does not provoke the riot.

The church does not need a riot.

Christians do not become more faithful by making everyone angry.

But neither should we assume that peace at any cost is the goal.

Faithfulness sometimes creates tension precisely because Jesus refuses to share the throne.

And when that happens, remember who the enemy is.

Not the person shouting.

Not the coworker.

Not the neighbor.

Not the politician.

Not the activist.

Not the unbeliever.

Not the person whose worldview frightens you.

Not even the person who treats you unjustly.

They may oppose you.

Their actions may require resistance.

They may require boundaries.

Justice may require intervention.

But the goal of the Christian life is not to destroy the people trapped inside the other kingdom.

Jesus is trying to rescue them.

That is why Paul's later instruction in Ephesians matters so much:

<u>"our struggle is not against flesh and blood".</u>

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Fight the darkness.

Love the person standing inside it.

Expose the lie.

Do not dehumanize the person who believes it.

Reject the idol.

Pray for the idolater.

Refuse the kingdom.

Love its citizens.

That is difficult.

It is easier to have enemies.

Enemies simplify the story.

They give us someone to blame.

Someone to mock.

Someone to defeat.

Jesus gives us something harder.

<u>People to love.</u>

Even while we stand against what is destroying them.

The riot eventually ends through an unexpected means.

Not a sermon.

Not a miracle.

Not Paul confronting the crowd.

A city official reminds everyone that there are lawful processes and that Rome may hold Ephesus accountable for disorder.

The crowd disperses.

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Gaius and Aristarchus survive.

The theater empties.

Artemis still stands.

Rome still governs.

Demetrius still has a business.

Nothing looks defeated.

And yet everything has changed.

Three years earlier, there was barely a church.

Now the gospel has spread throughout Asia.

People have abandoned magic.

Expensive books have burned.

Lives have changed.

Households worship Jesus.

Disciples have formed.

And an entire city has just erupted because the old kingdom can feel people slipping away.

Paul did not defeat Artemis by tearing down her temple.

He preached about a King who made Artemis unnecessary.

That may be one of the most important lessons in this entire story.

The church does not transform the world by becoming better at hating its enemies.

It transforms the world by becoming more faithful to Jesus.

Tell the truth.

Love people.

Reject idols.

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Refuse compromise.

Make disciples.

Serve faithfully.

And trust Christ to change hearts.

Because once a heart changes, the systems built on the old allegiance begin losing their power.

That is when the old kingdom fights back.

And when it does, do not panic.

Do not become what you oppose.

Do not confuse noise with victory.

Do not mistake people for the darkness holding them.

Remember your King.

Remember what grace did for you.

And remain faithful.

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LIVE IT TODAY

Identify one place where opposition, disagreement, or fear has tempted you to treat a person like an enemy instead of a person Jesus can redeem.

It may be someone at work.

A family member.

A political or cultural group.

Someone who has mocked your faith.

Someone whose decisions genuinely anger you.

Someone whose worldview you believe is harmful.

Write their name—or the group—down.

Then make two columns:

WHAT I MUST NOT COMPROMISE

and

WHAT LOVE STILL REQUIRES

In the first column, name the truth, conviction, boundary, or concern you believe faithfulness to Jesus requires you to maintain.

In the second, write one way you can maintain that conviction without contempt.

Pray for them. Speak without insult. Refuse to repeat dehumanizing language.

Listen before assuming. Set a necessary boundary without seeking revenge.

Correct something false without humiliating the person.

Do one of those things within the next seven days.

The goal is not agreement.

The goal is to remember:

The darkness may be the enemy. The person is someone Jesus can save.

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JOURNAL PROMPT

Where has fear made me more interested in defeating people than faithfully representing Jesus to them?

What am I afraid of losing?

Comfort?

Influence?

Money?

Control?

Status?

Tradition?

Approval?

Security?

Then ask:

What would it look like to resist what is wrong without allowing hatred, contempt, or fear to rule me?

Finish with:

“If my struggle is not ultimately against flesh and blood, then I need to…”

Be specific.

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PRAYER PROMPT

King Jesus, expose every allegiance in me that competes with You. Give me courage when obedience costs something and wisdom when the old kingdom pushes back. Keep me from confusing people with the darkness that holds them. Help me tell the truth without contempt, resist evil without hatred, and love the people You came to save. When opposition becomes loud, keep my allegiance steady. Amen.

THE NEXT EPISODE DEVOTIONAL

When the Threat Comes From Within

Companion to Episode 5: “The Warning”

Available for free at **www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-5**

In the next episode, Paul’s public battle in Ephesus gives way to one final private warning. The danger will no longer come only from Artemis, the marketplace, or an angry crowd. Paul will warn the elders that some of the greatest threats to the church may eventually rise from inside it.

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I sincerely hope that you have found something of value in this devotion. *Kingdoms Collide* is a ministry passion project from a guy who loves Jesus.

If you need prayer or want to share a kind word with me, I would love to hear from you. Everyone needs prayer and encouragement. I would love to be that for you and for you to be that for me.

Feel free to email me at **KingdomsCollidePodcast@gmail.com**

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