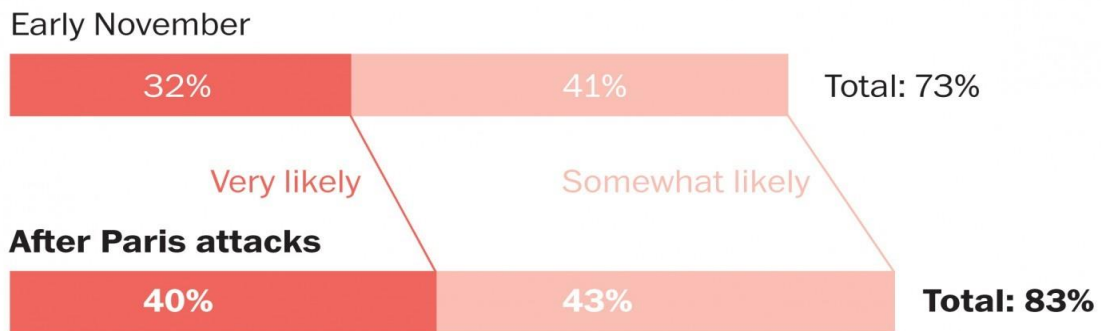


I tried to get the most recent polling information that I could on Friday... But the most current data that I was able to pull up was BEFORE the terrorist attack that happened in San Bernadino last week. ... I think we are all a little insecure and on edge about the near certainty of attacks happening on our shores and effecting people that we know.

A poll that was released two weeks ago... prior to the San Bernardino attack... gave the following information.

Q: How likely is a terrorist attack in the United States causing large numbers of lives to be lost in the near future?



Fears among Americans about terrorist attacks on U.S. soil have risen sharply a week after a major assault in Paris killed 130, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll, which finds a majority believing that the country is at war with “radical Islam.”

Fully 83 percent of registered voters say they believe a terrorist attack in the United States resulting in large casualties is likely in the near future, rising from 73 percent in a Quinnipiac University poll earlier this month asking the same question. Forty percent say a major attack in the United States is “very likely,” up eight percentage points since last week’s attacks

to match the record level of concern recorded after the 2005 subway bombings in Britain.

Of course... the terrorists would love nothing more than to wipe Christianity (or anything that looks like it) off the face of this earth. As we stare at the news headlines... and see the advance of ruthless evil... how do we stay in the peace of God... in the midst of such turmoil...?

Having the peace of God in the very midst of powerful opposition... that wants nothing more than to extinguish our faith... is the very story of our Christian History through the ages. ... We are not facing any new threat... and we can experience the same peace of God... that He has given to believers facing turmoil... down through the centuries.

As a matter of fact... our study today in Acts... brings us to a passage where Paul faced tremendous opposition... and yet he remained steady in the peace of God. The city of Ephesus... where Paul was ministering... turned into a riotous uproar. It was a mob of epic confusion. People were mad... and few knew what they were supposed to be mad about. Two of Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia are seized and Paul wanted to rush in to save them... but several government officials stop Paul... for his own safety.

Before any of this... during his previous missionary trip... Paul was in Lystra... a mob stoned him and then left... thinking that they had killed him. Paul got up... and walked right back into the city. In Philippi... Paul was beaten and thrown into prison. Once they locked him up in the miserable... dark *inner* prison... he and Silas joyful sang praises to God! ... (My mind can hardly fathom this...) ... Now today... we find him in Ephesus... and he

is every bit as much of an immovable rock in a stormy sea. He had peace in the midst of hateful turmoil. ... Paul was very much like Daniel... who rubbed the lions bellys until daybreak... and like David who look at Goliath and asked – “*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God?*”

How did Paul and his friends in Ephesus display such an amazing peace...? ... We want to examine our passage today... and find clues as to how this is possible. ... How can we hold onto the peace of God and mainly trust His most powerful weapons of warfare...?

The more you watch television news... aren't you tempted to throw down your spiritual weaponry... and rely primarily on secular armaments for regaining our sense of security...? (By secular armaments... I mean such things as relying most heavily upon human laws and government... political direction – which changes every time the wind blows... putting forth logic through social media and other sources... or taking home defense/self protection measures.) ... There is nothing wrong... that I can see... with using any of these resources – (I use them, myself) ... But if we act without the peace that God wants to steady us with... and try to rely more on these less effective tools - then... yes... we will have serious problems.

So today... we will be looking for clues that will help us to remain in God's peace and not lay down the best possible arsenal... that is only available to us... as believers.

As Christians... we are in a spiritual battle in which we face many adversaries. ... And we must look at all of life on two levels... the physical and the spiritual. ... Christians are to not fight the physical battles on a

physical level like the world does... but rather on a spiritual level and with spiritual weapons.

2 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

From last week's passage... we have already learned that Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan... that Paul was pulling down. ... Its inhabitants were held in the bondage that led to death. ... Lacking the truth of God... the people were hostage to idolatry. ... Their sources of spiritual truth were witches and warlocks... magicians and idolators. ...They were held captive by the chains of greed... superstition... immorality... fear... guilt and emptiness.

Ephesus was a city of wasted lives... lives which were ruled by Satan and his demons. ... This then was the arena into which Paul brought the gospel of Jesus Christ. ... He first shared it in the synagogue... and when his teaching was rejected... he rented the school of Tyrannus which became the center of his teaching for the next two years. ... Paul trained many... who were then sent out over the entire region from Ephesus. ... The truth of God's word began to tear down the strongholds of Satan... delivering a group of people out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Demons were on the run... magic books were being burned... the Word of God was prevailing!

I will begin today with the final two verses that we finished with last week...

Acts 19:18-20

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

It is important that we begin today with verses 18-20... because we need to see that the peace of God comes... once we start fearing God. The church needs to be confessing... and turning away from the known practices of evil that we allow in our lives. ... These were believers... here in these verses... who were confessing and burning the cultic books that they had kept in their lives. ... Do you have any known areas of sin that you have been holding onto... hiding away in a private closet of your life...? ... You probably will not know God's peace – until you confess it and turn away from it.

With so many in Ephesus... now getting serious about their walk with God... Paul saw that it was time for him to move on...

Acts 19:21-22

At the height of his success in ministry at Ephesus... Paul's mind is guided by the Holy Spirit... to grasp a conviction which was to become the driving compulsion of his life – “I must see Rome!” Rome had to be captured for Christ!

When I read these verses several things begin to jump off the page at me. #1. Is the importance of having convictions that become driving compulsion to our life. We are not meant to aimlessly drift through our Christian life... moving from one challenge to another... without a clear destination. Life passes too quickly. If we do not have Spirit-led goals... we will merely sit back and try to savor whatever progress we have made. (We will rest on our laurels... and be self-satisfied.)

Our ultimate destination... of course... is Heaven. ... But on the way there... God has special assignments for every believer... (every child of His)... He has singled out every one of us... for some kind of “assigned Rome” in our life. He will deploy us to a particular place to accomplish specific tasks in which no one else can fulfill. If we ask Him... I believe that He will make the where and when perfectly clear.

Maybe God has already been making your “Rome” known to you... but you lack God’s peace... because you have not been acting on it. ... What is your long range goal...? What are your short term goals...? Have you asked God...?

#2. The second thing I see when I read about Paul’s drive is that it was Spirit-led. We are not to dream big plans for God... and then set out to accomplish them. ... So often I have seen Christian leaders create a vision that is nothing more than a projection of their own ego... out into the future. And then they try to convince others that it is God’s will for them too. People often comply... in order not to offend their beloved leader. But God has not given them the same conviction.

When it is Spirit-led... the Spirit gives the same drive to the others He wants involved in it. ... The leader does not have to work hard at convincing others... “This is where God would have us go...!”

#3. It is up to God to fulfill the vision... in the manner He wants it achieved. The interesting thing is... Paul *did* go to Rome... but I’m sure it was not the way he planned to go. We will see that Paul goes as a prisoner to Rome. Paul immediately began acting on his Spirit-led vision... as God made alterations to what Paul’s original thoughts were. Paul had two concerns

that were part of his vision. Following up on churches he had already started... and helping the suffering believers in Jerusalem who were being persecuted. ... Paul sent a team out to begin the process – first to Achaia where Corinth was... and he sent his letter (which we know as 1st Corinthians with them.) This is part of what he wrote in that letter...

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (ESV)

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Paul also wrote a letter at this time... and sent it to Rome. Here is some of what he wrote in that letter...

Romans 15:25-26 (ESV)

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

Paul sent ahead of him two very dedicated helpers... namely... Timothy and Erastus. ... We have already learned about Timothy... but this is the first mention of Erastus. ...Three times Erastus is mentioned in Scripture (here, Romans 16:23 and II Timothy 4:20). ... He was a convert from Corinth where he had held an important job in the city. He was its treasurer (according to Romans 16:23) ... This would make Erastus especially helpful in taking up the collection from the saints for the suffering in Jerusalem.

Paul took immediate action on the Spirit-led plans. ... And again... I ask... are you acting on the plans God has made clear to you. ... The peace of God comes... as we step out on the special assignments that He gives us.

But the peace of God does not mean the absence of trouble. It won't mean that for you and I... and neither did it mean that for Paul.

Acts 19:23-27

It was the ol' "Mom... the flag... and apple pie" routine!

I spoke a little last week about the cult of Diana... or Artemis. Her fame had indeed been spread throughout the Mediterranean world. ... Archeologists have found silver shrines of this 1st century temple in as far- away places as Spain. The Ephesians were very proud of their local deity whose fame brought visitors from all over the known world. Visitors would come and take home a souvenir made by these silver craftsmen.

The original image of Artemis... was probably a meteorite that fell from the sky. It was shaped like a woman with several breasts. It became their god of fertility. Temple prostitutes were used as the means to worship her. It was a disgusting cult... that probably had as many believing it... as there are today who believe in Santa Clause. ... It was propped up by tradition... the trade industry (local trade union 666)... and the visitor's bureau.

Demetrius did not quarrel with Paul's doctrine. His anger boiled because of his lost profits. But he hid his greed behind the mask of patriotism and religious loyalty. He worked up a crowd... making them feel as though they needed to be heroes for the sake of their land and national pride.

Demetirus succeeded in working up his fellow-workers into such a frenzy... that they spilled out into the streets of Ephesus... and got the rest of the city worked up... And please notice that they did not even know why they were so angry. He created a great pandemonium in Ephesus.

Acts 19:28-34

Mobs seldom have a clue as to what is going on. ... During the 1960s and 1970s... when cities and campuses in our country were plagued by mob-type crowds demonstrating and rioting... the great portion of those in the crowds had no answers... and were not sure what the issue was. ... And have you watched news casts of recent day riots. ... Newspeople will interview them... and few are able to express why they are angry.

Not much has changed since the 1st century. This is the nature of a mob. When they have no intelligent argument for their destructive behavior... (when they have nothing of substance to say)... they simply chant for hours... thinking that all the chanting... will be sufficient evidence... and that it alone is enough to convince...

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get a crowd to support wrong causes? ... They can often be drummed up in a matter of minutes. ... But to get a crowd to support truth is another story. ... Evil - not truth - appeals to crowds.

Benjamin Franklin said that a mob was "a monster with heads enough, but no brains." ... Max Lerner wrote, "Every mob, in its ignorance and blindness and bewilderment, is a League of Frightened Men that seeks reassurance in collective action."

Mobs know no law but only action. Satan loves to stir up mob action against the godly. Then action against the godly can be quick and brutal and just as unjust and illegal. (LISTEN... I have seen manipulators whip up mob action in a church. It happens more often than we care to think...)

It was a "religious mob" that shouted "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" to Pilate, and eventually got its way. ... Had this Ephesian mob succeeded in its plans, Paul would have been arrested and executed before the law could have stepped in to protect him.

Apparently they could not find Paul... so they took two of his associates instead. They brought Gaius and Aristarchus to an open theater that was used for town business meetings and court proceedings. It was a large u-shaped stadium that held up to 24,000 people. On this day it was full of angry Ephesians.

Look at verse 30 and 31 again... and notice how God protects Paul.

Acts 19:30-31

These Asiarchs were city officials. Paul had such a ministry in Ephesus that city officials were his friends... and they would not let Paul go to the theater in the midst of the riot.

What happened next is interesting. ... The Jews convinced one of their own... Alexander... to stand before the crowd and speak against Paul and the Christians. ... But when he arose and lifted his hand to quiet them... the mob went into a frenzy... crying out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." This chant went on—for a nauseating two whole hours. (I'm sure they figured it was sufficient evidence to convince...)

Acts 19:33-34

This was an attempt of the Jews to keep themselves from being accused of being the cause of the riot. The Gentiles had great contempt for the Jews. They knew the Jews were against idolatry (the captivity cured them of that

problem), and felt that Christianity was part of Judaism. The Jews knew the riot was caused by anti-Christian sentiments and wanted to be defended as not being part of Christianity. So they thrust Alexander to the front (he was obviously one of their leaders) to defend the Jews.

Alexander no doubt intends to explain that the Jewish community did not instigate the current confusion. ... But typical Greek anti-Judaism prejudice refused to allow him to speak.

It was the city clerk who finally got matters under control... and he did it primarily for political reasons. ... Ephesus was permitted by Rome to exist as a "free city"... with its own elected assembly... but this was a very fragile agreement and open to be revoked at any given moment. The City clerk knew that the Romans would have rejoiced to find an excuse for removing these privileges. ... So the clerk brilliantly employs the same tactics that the silversmiths used to arouse the mob. This clerk will use national pride to quiet and reassure them — the greatness of their city and of their goddess.

Acts 19:35-41

Politicians of our day should be envious of the skill this politician employed here. He did five things.

#1. He catered to their pride. This city official fed the pride of the mob by telling them they were well-known and that their religion was well-known. Flattering the people enabled the townclerk to do some serious talking.

#2. He confirmed their beliefs. In verse 36 he said... *"Seeing that these things cannot be denied..."*

#3. He told them to act in accordance to what they believed. *“Seeing that these things cannot be denied... you ought to be quite and do nothing rash...”* ... After he had flattered the mob... he now tells them to behave. ...The townclerk says in essence... *“Our belief ought to affect our conduct.”*

#4. He gently tells them that the mob was violating the law.

#5. He cautions them about the likelihood of losing their favorable status with Rome. The government of Rome was especially sensitive about riotous activity in a city. ... They even had a law which made it an offense that was punished by death... for anyone to engage in promoting a riot. Ephesus had many privileges other cities did not have. The town clerk gave the people a sober warning about evil consequences that could come from this riot.

This bit of warning from the wise city official was heeded and the pandemonium ended. ... The silversmiths lost their case. ... The story ends when these people have shouted themselves hoarse... and finally a legal official declares... *“First of all, these men didn’t do anything wrong. If we do anything illegal... Rome is going to exact retribution. ... So everybody go home!”*

It’s almost like children being sent to their rooms without supper. This great effort to push back against the cause of Christ... in effect... peters out and looks ridiculous. ... God was still running things even though all the people seemed to be against Him.

Today... Ephesus is gone... and so is the worldwide worship of Diana of the Ephesians. ... The city and the temple are gone... and the silversmiths' guild is gone. ... Ephesus is a place visited primarily by archaeologists and people on Holy Land tours.

Yet the Gospel of God's grace and the church of Jesus Christ are still here! We have four inspired letters that were sent to the saints in Ephesus— Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation 2:1-7. ... The name of Paul is honored... but the name of Demetrius is forgotten. (Were it not for Paul, we would not have met Demetrius in the first place!)

We need to make this as personal as possible. ... Perhaps at this point in your life you are terrified. ... You're fighting something that looms so BIG... (too big for you.) ... You don't know how your circumstances will ever change. - But they will. ... Just as the events... that were so big and looming in Ephesus have changed.

I don't know how God will intervene or when. But when God acts... the chains that seem like impossible shackles are struck off. ... Strongholds fall when He orders them to. Trust in the Lord and look for his salvation. Use your most effective weaponry.

When your prayer... that you made in faith... is not immediately answered... there still is hope. ... Hope has to do with God's promises that are still future and hidden... just as faith has to do with God's promises that are here and now. ... To the person who has believed for today but has not seen the answer come today... there comes the call to hope. ... Hope

says... *"Tomorrow also is God's. Enough has happened already to assure you that the rest is on the way."*

When our Lord decides to intervene in a life or a place or in history... when it's God's timing to deal with the thing you've been afraid of - it **will** happen. You must not fear that the darkness can overcome the light. It cannot. We don't always know when God will act. ... But what we **do** know for sure is that when He determines to act... nothing can withstand His determination. Every neck that is stiffened... every arm that is raised... every voice that is sounded against Christ and His claims (from a terrorist overseas... or on our shores) - **will fall**.

Today the church (as a whole) does not seem to operate with the same confident peace that governed Paul life and ministry. ... I believe that the reason is because so many Christian believers have been desensitized to the lures and poisons of the world... the flesh... and the devil. ... Multitudes within the professing church are not only thoroughly infatuated with the charms of money and influence... but are practicing sensualists... who enjoy the most degrading entertainment without any remorse whatsoever. ... Today many believers' witness is anemic and corrupted. ... Much of the church is clamoring to get on the world's bandwagon. ... We need to begin with the kind of repenting we saw in the opening verses that we began with this morning. Instead of throwing down our powerful weapons... we need to throw onto the fire those things in our lives that we know have been dragging us down.

But let's remember - when the Holy Spirit causes us to repent... and places us onto His Own course that He has for our life... (with His special

assignments for us)... we too might experience some persecution. But God can supply us with His perfect shalom... just like He gave to Paul during turbulent times... on more than one occasion.

If you long for the peace of God in the midst of a chaotic world... I suggest that you do the following in God's strength:

1. Yield to the Holy Spirit's promptings. Surrender daily to Him.
2. Confess specific sins (agree with him that the matters he is convicting you of are wrong). Name them. Materialism? Sensuality? Idolatry? Pride? Lying? Bitterness? Coldness of heart?
3. Ask God to give you the strength to turn back to Him. Agree with Him that you can truly repent only by His enabling grace.
4. Do whatever He tells you to do in His precious Word.
5. Rest in Him.