

20 Acts 19:1-22 Miracles in Ephesus – a bonfire of the vanities

Imagine being a headline writer in Ephesus in 55AD. They must have had a field-day - 'Tyranny or truth? The lectures that everyone wants to hear' (v.9), 'Hankie-pankie healing!' (v12), 'Defeat for the not-so-magnificent seven' (v.16). What event in today's passage would have grabbed most public attention?

I think what got most people talking was the public destruction of sorcerer's scrolls – burning perhaps four million pounds' worth of documents (vs.18, 19). In this most religious of cities, known for its love of the occult, this event must have stood out.

Why did they do it? This was no evangelistic stunt. It was a public rejection of what these new believers used to worship, trust in and rely on, because now it was Jesus they worshipped, trusted and relied on. The old had gone, the new had come (2 Corinthians 5:17). This was radical repentance.

What would a similar event look like in Ireland today? What do we cling to that needs to go on the bonfire of our own personal vanities? Is it the worship of sport or academic success or pleasure or pornography? Is it a trust in national identity expressed in flags and (ironically) bonfires? Is it a reliance on our own material security and wealth that blinds us to the needs of the poor? What would happen if people saw us give up what we once held dear?

Pray today for yourself and your congregation – for the courage to burn all that stops the love of Jesus from completely filling our lives (Ephesians 3:16-19).

'All I once held dear, built my life upon,
all this world reveres and wars to own;
All I once thought gain I have counted loss,
Spent and worthless now compared to this.
Knowing you Jesus, knowing you –
there is no greater thing'
(Graham Kendrick).