

Ephesus

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Date: 31 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. My name is Jenny and I'm a member at Brantsfield Evangelical Church. Welcome to our service today. I'm going to read from Acts chapter 19.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They answered, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. So Paul asked, Then what baptism did you receive?

John's baptism, they replied. Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

[1 : 05] There were about twelve men in all. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to those who were ill, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them.

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, In the name of the Lord Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.

Seven sons of Siva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, because who are you?

[2 : 36] Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house, naked and bleeding.

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. After I have been there, he said, I must visit Rome also. He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

[3 : 47] About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said, You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow, Paul, has convinced and led a stray large numbers of people here in Ephesus, and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting, Great is Artemis of Ephesians, Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Arasarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theatre together.

Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre.

[5 : 08] The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him.

He motioned for silence in order to make a defence before the people. But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. The city clerk quieted the crowd and said, Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?

Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.

If then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open, and there are pro-consuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.

As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion since there is no reason for it. After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

[6 : 25] Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that we are able to meet like this and read this passage together and hear the message from Graham. We ask that you'll give us receptive hearts and will help us to listen to what you have to say to us via the message.

We pray that as well as listening to it and enjoying the message, we might also meditate and think about it and also apply it to our own lives in the weeks ahead. Amen.

Well, good morning, everyone. It's wonderful to have you with us. Please can I encourage you to grab a Bible and come with me to Acts chapter 19. It's so important that we have the word of God open in front of us so we can hear his voice.

So get Acts chapter 19 open in front of you. We're going to finish this morning a little series that we've been in over the last few weeks looking at what happened when the gospel, the message of Jesus, what happened when it first hit Europe.

Now, to get us into this today, let me take you back to your childhood. I wonder if you were like me. I wonder if you ever found yourself playing this game called Pooh Sticks. No one ever explained to me why it was called that.

[7 : 38] To this day, it's still a mystery, but that's what we called it. It was called Pooh Sticks. And it wasn't the most complicated of games, really. You found yourself a bridge. You found yourself a mate.

You found yourself a stick. And what happened is you both dropped your sticks into the river at one side and then you legged it to the other side of the bridge to see whose stick was the first to come out the other side of the bridge.

Right? Told you it wasn't the most complicated of the games. But here was the science behind the game. Really simply, your stick always went with the flow of the river.

Right? And we sometimes use that phrase, don't we, to describe how somebody is living. We talk about somebody who just goes with the flow. They're happy to drift along in the same direction that everyone else seems to be going.

They're happy to think the same things, to behave the same way, to have the same dreams, just following the flow of the cultural river as a cultural poo stick.

[8 : 47] So here we are in Acts chapter 19. Paul has arrived in the city of Ephesus. And let me show you the flow of the cultural river of Ephesus.

You see, your lonely planet guide to Ephesus is dominated by one thing. The Ephesus tour bus stops in one place. Right? Edinburgh has the castle.

Paris has the Eiffel Tower. Pisa has the leaning tower. Ephesus, in the first century, has the great temple of Artemis. She is the goddess, if you like, of life and health.

And she's said to live in this huge pillared temple which dominates the city's skyline. In fact, it is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It's an incredible thing to look at. And people flock from all over to see the temple of Artemis, not just because of how it looks, but they come here to see what the whole setup is about.

[9 : 58] What does the whole setup represent in Ephesus? Health, wealth, and happiness. Happiness. That's what the people in Ephesus, they love.

Right? They love those things. Health, wealth, and happiness. See, if ever any of those things is in jeopardy, boy, they will come out swinging and fighting. So here's the song that you'll hear on every jukebox in Ephesus.

Here's the chant that you'll hear on the streets from the people. We get it twice in our passage. Look with me. Verse 28 is the first time we get it. Right? Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

And again, verse 34. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Except they go on this time for two hours. That's an awful lot of chanting. They love Artemis.

That's the flow of the cultural river of Ephesus. Just worshipping Artemis. And the thing to see is it's a city full of poo stick people.

[11 : 05] And your boy Paul turns up in this city. And he starts preaching about Jesus. This God man sent to earth from a loving heavenly father who came and lived perfectly, who died unjustly on the cross as a perfect substitute for the sin in our lives that's offended our creator.

And he rose and he lives and he offers forgiveness and he offers hope and he offers newness of life to all those who would humble themselves, look to him, behold him, and believe.

And this same Jesus one day will return to judge the world. On the basis of what? On the basis of how they have responded to him. That's the message.

His audience? The people going with the flow of the cultural river of Ephesus. Paul is preaching in the synagogue.

Paul is teaching in the public lecture hall. And he's doing it consistently over a period of time. And all of a sudden what seems to happen by the grace of God is that salmon start appearing in the Ephesian river.

[12 : 31] Right? Those who listen, who believe, who repent, just means turn around, do a 180, and they start swimming upstream. Now how has that happened? Come with me.

It has happened through the word of the Lord. Let me just pick out two verses for you. Come with me where Luke shows us this. In fact, I think this is his big thing that he wants us to see as he records this episode in Acts chapter 19.

See what's happening here. Verse 10. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard, heard what?

Heard the word of the Lord. And then verse 20. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely, and it grew in power.

So what's happening here is Paul is just opening the scriptures. He's explaining Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is moving in power through the word of the Lord and impacting people's lives, penetrating people's souls, bringing this deep conviction of sin that I am not right with my creator God, exposing the darkness and the darkness of the human heart, and shining brightly on Christ, and saying, behold the Lamb of God.

[13 : 57] Behold the beauty of Jesus Christ. And that is making a seismic impact on people's lives.

Which is why, as a side note, if ever our friends and our family members who we love are ever to come to meet Jesus for themselves, friends, it is going to happen through us opening the word of the Lord and allowing the Holy Spirit to take these words and impact their lives.

The word of the Lord is bringing radical and holistic change into people's lives. This God is into the business of transformation by his grace.

And you say, well, in what ways have people been changed? Let me just pick out two ways here how people have been changed by the word of the Lord. Firstly, in terms of the affection of their hearts.

Because here is what we find out. If you come with me, here's what we find out about the people in Ephesus in verses 11 to 20. It appears that many of them are caught up in the occult.

[15 : 11] We get mentioned here of witchcraft, of magic arts, of sorcery, right? Today, what you're looking at, you're looking at Ouija boards, tarot cards, horoscopes. And just in case you think we're in a far off land here, let me just say that in our city, one of the most popular things to do in Edinburgh is take the walking ghost tour of the city, right?

Past our house every night, going up to the depot, is the ghost bus tours. This stuff is alive and well. And it's real and it's dangerous. And do you see how it's got a hold on many people in Ephesus? They're gripped by this stuff. But verse 11, do you see what's going on? God is doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. What's going on here is he's confirming, God confirming to the world this one crucial moment that Paul and his message are the real deal.

And so here is what people begin to realize in Ephesus. That God's power is so much greater than the powers of the occult.

Verse 17, do you see as they respond to this, what happens? Luke tells us that great fear falls on the people. Fear being just that rightful recognition of who God is.

[16 : 30] And in response to that, who I am. Just reorientating our lives towards who God is. And great fear falls upon these people.

And not just that, do you see how the name of Jesus is being, and what is the word here? Extolled. Right? Greek word here just means magnified, put in lights, lifted high.

Whereas before, there was a love for self in these people's hearts. All of a sudden, now, there is a new affection that's been replaced by a love for Jesus.

In the words of Augustine, he was a man from the 5th century who previously lived a life of pleasure-seeking before he came to meet Jesus. Here's how he puts it in his own words.

He says this, how sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You, Lord, drove them from me.

[17 : 35] You who are the true, the sovereign joy. And get this, you drove them from me and you took their place. O Lord, my God, my light, my wealth, and my salvation.

Jesus has taken the place of the highest affection in these people's hearts. He's become the great treasure of their souls. It's amazing every week of the Gospels how often you find Jesus talking about this kind of thing.

Talking about the kingdom of heaven is like. It's like a pearl of great price. It's like a man finding treasure in a field and he sells everything that he has so he can buy the field and get the treasure. That's what it's like. When Jesus becomes the most precious thing in your life. And you see how some in Ephesus, some of these people, they clearly want to mark and make that decisive break from their former ways of thinking and living.

And so what do they do? They take their occultic books, the things that used to dominate them, the things that they used to look to for guidance and meaning and hope and what do they do? They chuck them down, they strike up a match and hey presto is bonfire night.

[18 : 56] And Luke wants us to know that this isn't just a couple of books on the fire here. This is 50,000 pieces of silver which is some serious dough in this day. Some commentators put it at almost six million dollars worth of books which shows you there's some serious cash kicking about this city.

But here are people publicly saying that stuff it's worthless, it's shallow, it's dangerous and most importantly it doesn't have a hold on me anymore because I found something greater and better. Jesus fills and thrills my soul. And I love this, I remember my friend Paul years ago when he became a Christian, do you know what he did?

He gave away the clothes in his wardrobe because he was into his designer gear, right, he spent tons of money on it, he wanted to look good, dressed to impress, be in the right places with the right people and I think it was a lifestyle that he realized was all too readily calling the shots in his life and it was his way of saying that that stuff it just doesn't have a hold on me anymore.

Jesus is worth more to me than that way of life. I love the old hymn by Charles Wesley, he puts it like this, talking of Jesus, he breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.

[20 : 33] Friends, let me ask you, as the word of the Lord comes to you today, is there something that's got a grip on your soul and your life? What is it? Things that's dominating you, maybe you want to get in touch today and I'd love to chat and chat this out and meet with you and pray with you.

Jesus breaks the power of cancelled sin. The old has gone, the new has come and the word of the Lord continues to increase and prevail mightily.

People are being changed in Ephesus. The affections of the heart and secondly, the direction of the mind. See, as time ticks on in Ephesus, it seems that more and more people are responding to the message of Jesus and as more and more people as they start swimming against the flow of the Ephesian river and if they begin to question the way of thinking in Ephesus saying, is there more to life than this?

Verse 23, do you see how tensions reach boiling point which tells you this is, there's a lot of people who are questioning this way of life here. Reaches boiling point, it all kicks off because as Paul preaches, people in the city are beginning to think and here's how they report it, right?

Verse 26, and you see in here how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia and here's what he's saying, he says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.

[22 : 17] Right, think of it like this, I wonder if you remember watching Heartbeat on telly back in the 90s, right? You remember that art show with Tony Hart who was a presenter and he'd got this little man, this little helper that he'd formed out of clay called Morph.

I remember as a child, they kind of freaked me out, couldn't look at Play-Doh the same again, but he had a little Morph and they used to do stuff together and create things together. So you know in all my times watching Heartbeat, here's what I never saw.

I never saw Tony Hart bow down and start worshipping Morph. See, that really simply is essentially Paul's logic here.

Follow with me, follow Paul. How can something made with human hands be a god? If something is man-made, if something can be so easily destroyed, if something can come and go and rise and fall with the ever-changing seasons of life, if something is here one minute and gone the next, then surely that makes for a pretty lousy god.

Surely the very definition of a god is that it is the creator rather than the created. that it stands unchanging above the things of us and the things of this earth.

[23 : 45] That would be a better definition of a god. And what's happening is that people are beginning to stop in Ephesus and to think about what Paul is saying and it seems to be making sense in their minds.

And as people become Christians, there's a change in the direction of their mind. Health, wealth and happiness, they make terrible things to spend your life pursuing. Why?

Because looks will fade. Right? Money will rise and fall as markets dip in and out, rise up and down. Happiness will come and go.

Friends, we know what our moods are like. Seems to me we need something far more stable and far more unchanging, something far more secure in which to place our trust.

Right? I remember reading a book back in the early 2000s just to illustrate this that simply said when he was at the height of his power, simply said, do you know what? There will come a day when Tiger Woods will not win.

[24 : 52] I remember reading that as a teenager and thinking, this guy clearly knows nothing about golf. Right? He just didn't have the comprehension to think 30, 40 years down the line and to think about the fact that that might be true.

Looks will fade, talent will go, strength will fall. Paul says gods made by human hands are no gods at all. And do you see this is terrible news for trade in the city?

We meet this man called Demetrius who's realized that people have stopped buying the little figurines of Artemis that he sells, that's how he gets his income. He sells them that people can buy them, take it home and have a little worship session in their home, put it on the mantelpiece front of the living room and there we go.

Right? He's a Jerry Maguire kind of guy, right? Show me the money. I'm interested in the money. He's totally bought into the Ephesian dream. And he gets his fellow sellers together and tries to rally them to put a stop to this, to do something.

They drag the men who they know are into this stuff. Verse 29, Gaius and Aristarchus who are willing to stand with Paul in this one, they drag them into the assembly.

[26 : 05] And here's the thing to know about the crowd that gets swept up in this. Verse 32, and this is fascinating. Most of them didn't even know why they had come together.

In other words, see if you're a roaming news correspondent doing the rounds in Ephesus, right? There's a bit of news going on here, there's a riot, I'm there covering it. And you're running around with your microphone, and you're asking the crowd, saying, why are you here?

What's going on? They couldn't have told you. I don't really know why I'm here, just kind of everyone else was doing it, and I kind of got swept up in it, and I'm somehow over there.

Do you see how their poo sticks just go in with the flow? Let me just ask you when last time it was that you stopped to think about why you believe what you believe, and stop to think about why you do the things you do in life.

This lockdown has provided many of us just with a chance to stop and to think about the things that we're pursuing with our lives. We've maybe been a little bit exposed, haven't we, as to the things that we perhaps have been trusting in our lives, the things that we're dreaming of, hoping will happen, the things that we were gutted were missing.

[27 : 31] We often talk about keeping up with the Joneses. These are phrases that we use in our culture. Keeping up with the Joneses, we talk about being caught up in the rat race. Phrases like, each to their own, they just fall off her tongue without really thinking about what it means.

And we find ourselves singing along with Lady Gaga, don't hide yourself in regret, just love yourself and you're set, I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way. And we think, why are we singing these things?

And all of a sudden we begin to see ourselves and the people of this crowd who are shouting, who are coming together, who are making a racket, and yet they cannot articulate why they're doing the things that they're doing.

And back in the scene, they drag these Christians before the town clerk and they bring the charges against this new teaching. Would you deal with it? That's what they ask them. Town clerk sees nothing in it.

says, if you guys want to take it to the courts, you are welcome, and they don't because they realize that if they did that, it would get chucked out because it's baseless. And the irony being that they are actually the ones who are causing the scene and the riot here, not the Christians.

[28 : 43] But again, just see, if you remember last week, what we saw in the previous chapter of Acts, who's in control in Ephesus? What was the same person who was in control in Corinth?

Jesus is in control in Ephesus. He is sovereign. He is good. He is watching over this situation. But as he was happening, as the word of God is penetrating this city, is impacting these people, what's happening is that people are becoming followers of Jesus.

What's happening is that there's a change in the affection of people's hearts, lives, and there's a change in the direction of people's minds. Life's heading one way as a poo stick, now all of a sudden by the sheer grace of God transformed to swim upstream towards knowing and savoring and enjoying our creator, which is the very reason that we were created in the first place.

As people's lives are so radically and holistically changed by the Jesus, the risen Jesus, the reigning Jesus who we meet in the pages of scripture. Let me just give you my favorite example of this as we close.

As you're in lockdown, one of the things that I've loved being able to do is just have a little bit more time to do some reading. And one of the things that I've been reading is a biography of a man called John Newton.

[30 : 10] Do you know, if ever there was a life that testified to the change in somebody's life that encountering the forgiveness and grace of Jesus makes in somebody's life it is of this guy's.

In his former life he worked on slave ships, transporting people back and forth across the seas and loved it, didn't see anything wrong with it, just going along with the flow.

And this is what his friends said of John Newton aboard the ship his fellow sailors. Somebody said this, his debaucheries make even the other sailors blush.

Right? Another said he is a ring leader for sin. And then John Newton meets Jesus. And he sees all of a sudden the ugliness of what he's doing with his life.

And how he's viewing other human beings. And he sees the worthlessness of the things he used to prize. And all of a sudden in the years to come he stops what he's doing.

[31 : 14] He moves to be a minister and he also moves to work against the very slave trade that he used to love. And he's daily amazed that somebody like him could become a Christian.

And he pens the words to the best known song, to the best known tune anywhere in the world. And it goes like this. Amazing grace.

How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see.

Friends, Artemis was destroyed just over 300 years after this episode in Acts chapter 19. But the word of the Lord, the very fact that we're here today is proof that it continues to increase and mightily prevail.

Let's pray. So Father, thank you that you are in the business of transforming lives by your amazing grace. And we pray Father for the affections of our hearts here today.

[32 : 35] and the direction of our minds here today that you would transform us and help us to treasure Jesus above everything else in this life.

And in his precious name we pray. Amen. many thanks Graham. Now, over the last few weeks we've heard from members about how God has worked in their lives.

And so just before we have our final song let's hear an inspirational story from John. Hello, my name is John Cameron and it's been suggested that I might spend a few moments just sharing the little of my journey with you.

Now, although I live in Edinburgh and have done for many years, I was born and brought up in the Highlands. And for the first seven or eight years of my life I lived in Doors.

Now, that's not because I was angriphobic, but because Doors is a little village on the shores of Loch Ness. And that's where I stayed. My early years involved regular activities which included attending church most Sundays with my father.

[33 : 48] Now, church for us was the local pre-church of Scotland, which was a very small and aged congregation. And in reality, I think the second youngest person there was probably the dad.

Because of that, there was no Sunday school or other activities for children. And my parents signed us up for something called the Highlands and Islands Postal Sunday School Service.

This was run by a young brethren couple who each month sent out Bible stories and activities to children across the Highlands. And we completed them in our own time, sent them back and received feedback from the following month.

One of the highlights of the year was the Sunday school camp, which every summer for two weeks, children gathered from across the Highlands and had the opportunity to enjoy fun activities and Bible teaching.

It was at these camps that I experienced the first time people explaining the Bible in a way that was appropriate to a child. I began to realise that this God and this Jesus that I heard about most Sundays actually was relevant to my life.

[34 : 59] I learned that Jesus came to earth, he lived here, died and rose again to provide a way back to God for people like me.

And so as a child, I began to trust and follow. However, it wasn't until I was 17 and went to university that I had the opportunity to observe Christians on a day-to-day basis.

And through the work of the Christian Union and church that I attended, I soon realised that Christianity wasn't just for holidays and holidays. It was something that I was called to commit to on a day-to-day basis.

And so for the last 40 years, that's what I've sought to do. And that kind of brings us to lockdown. A time of challenge, but a time of learning and following.

Now just to give you a little bit of background, many of you will know that in early 2018, my wife was diagnosed with dementia. And so shortly thereafter, I took early retirement so that I could focus on being at home and supporting her.

[36 : 10] This means that for me, lockdown hasn't been the huge up people than it has been for many people. However, that doesn't mean it's been plain sailing. If you know anything about dementia, you'll know that people who suffer from it require support and routine.

Any change from that can result in chaos. So for Rosemary, overnight lockdown meant that all external support and all our normal routines were changed.

And I expected chaos to follow. people. So the reality has been that during lockdown, Rosemary has experienced a real sense of peacefulness that can only come from God.

She hasn't been agitated. She hasn't been worried. She's been genuinely peaceful. And so for us, lockdown has been a time of rest and relaxation that we probably wouldn't have expected.

And so for us, another thing that lockdown has brought has been an opportunity to support and share with others.

[37 : 25] Through our dementia networks, we've got to know quite a number of couples living in a similar situation for ourselves. And sadly, over these past few weeks, a number of the people that we know have suffered from the virus, either at home or in care homes.

people. And so I've had the opportunity to just journey with people through that, through the telephone and emails, to be there and to share with people.

Now as Christians, we often worry about what to say or what to do in times of distress. But these past few weeks have shown me that actually there are opportunities just to be with people and support people.

And thankfully, all of the people that we know that have had the virus have recovered from it. But sharing has been a great opportunity. The third thing that I would draw to your attention that has been brought about by lockdown is the opportunity for prayer.

As somebody who's tied to the home, attending the church prayer meeting is not something that's easy. But through our Zoom meetings on a evening, I've had the chance for the first time in a couple of years to join in corporate prayer.

[38 : 49] And that's been a real joy and a blessing. Now, if you haven't tried the Zoom prayer time, I'd encourage you to do that. Yes, initially it can seem a bit strange.

But in reality, when you put your eyes closed and you're praying, you could easily be there in the church and the hall with others. The only difference, probably, is that actually the seeking is more comfortable.

So, yes, lockdown has brought challenges and it brings difficulties. But for me, it has also brought opportunities. And it's been a time to rest, enjoy the peacefulness and to give thanks to God.

Now, I don't know what the future holds, but I'm sure there'll be plenty more journey for us all to enjoy. Thanks.

Goodbye.