

Acts 20

- Paul last days and weeks in Ephesus caused quite a stir, and almost led to a riot over lost income by local idol makers
 - Paul no doubt took this as a sign that it was time for him to move on as he had already planned to do
 - He has set his mind on going to Rome, but first he wants to visit Macedonia and later Jerusalem for Passover
 - Chapter 20 tells of the final leg of Paul's third journey

[Acts 20:1](#) After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.

[Acts 20:2](#) When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

[Acts 20:3](#) And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

[Acts 20:4](#) And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

[Acts 20:5](#) But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

[Acts 20:6](#) We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

- In vv.1-2 we have the shortest account for any leg of Paul's missionary journeys
 - In two verses, Luke summarizes months of travel
 - Fortunately, we have Paul's own writings in 2Cor and Romans which fill in some pieces (and consult your map of the 3rd journey)
 - First, he goes to Troas and spends some time there
 - Yet he remained troubled over things he heard about the church in Corinth, down the road
 - Earlier Paul writes a stern letter (1Cor) to the church
 - He sends it to Corinth with Titus

- Paul is concerned for how the church in Corinth has received his rebuke, so he begins to move out of Macedonia toward Corinth, probably impatient to get news
 - On the way westward, Paul runs into Titus returning from Corinth and receives a positive report concerning Corinth
 - In the Fall of AD 56, Paul writes 2Cor while still in Macedonia
- Finally Paul reaches Greece, which is Achaia or Corinth
 - After 3 months in his return to Corinth, Paul intended to sail to Jerusalem for the Passover
 - There are three Jewish feasts that were supposed to be celebrated in person in the city of Jerusalem and Passover was one
 - It was a common to see Jewish pilgrimage ships chartered in foreign ports to ferry Jews back to Jerusalem for the Spring Feasts
 - Paul had evidently planned to board one of these chartered ships for a direct route back to Jerusalem in time for Passover
 - This would have been the perfect opportunity for Jews to conspire against Paul and throw him overboard one night
 - He would have simply disappeared with no trace
 - So Paul decides to return the way he came, through Macedonia
 - And in doing so, Paul gives up hope of reaching Jerusalem for Passover
- As he leaves Corinth, Paul has a special delegation in tow
 - The men listed were representatives of the various Gentile churches
 - The men listed represented the newly established believers in Macedonia, Galatia and Asia
 - Paul likely was representing Achaia himself
 - And Luke may have represented Philippi

- In fact, the trip took Paul back to Philippi, where he meets up with Luke, as we notice the appearance of “we” again in v.5
- These men were joined with Paul because they were carrying monetary gifts from their respective congregations to the Jewish church in Jerusalem
 - The Gentile churches has been taught by Paul that giving in this way (e.g., giving by the wealthy Gentile churches to the impoverished Jewish church in Jerusalem) was important to their testimony
 - Paul teaches this in 2Cor 8-9
 - The church in Corinth had plenty and Paul notes that much poorer churches in Macedonia had given to a greater degree
 - So Paul uses this fact as a measuring stick to test the maturity and sacrificial nature of the church in Corinth
 - Now Paul leads a delegation of men back to Israel to show the church’s generosity
- By the time this delegation meets up with Luke in Philippi, the Passover has come
 - So Paul, Luke and probably a few other Jewish companions of Paul remain in Philippi to celebrate the 8 days of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - While the Gentile members of the delegation continued on to Troas to secure a ship
 - After the feast is over Paul and the rest continue to Troas

[Acts 20:7](#) ¶ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

[Acts 20:8](#) There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

[Acts 20:9](#) And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead.

[Acts 20:10](#) But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, “Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.”

[Acts 20:11](#) When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left.

[Acts 20:12](#) They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted

- From here on through the end of Luke's narrative, the storyline reads more like a travel journal, in keeping with Luke's point of view as a traveling companion
 - Luke will remain with Paul from this point forward, and he records what he sees along the trip
 - So be prepared for discussions of ports of call, nights in hotels or other travel vignettes
 - Luke opens with a remarkable story...
 - A group of Gentile Christians are gathering to break bread on the first day of the week
 - The reference to breaking bread is a mention of the Last Supper remembrance incorporated into a worship service
 - Notice that the meet time on this occasion was the first day of the week
 - This is a Sunday on our calendar
 - Though Luke doesn't say whether this was a weekly practice or simply a special occasion, it does suggest a change from typical Jewish practice
 - Naturally, these were Gentile believers, so in their previous life they would have cared little for the Jewish tradition of meeting on the Sabbath, the last day of the week
 - Instead, they established a day that made sense to them, the day of the week Jesus was resurrected, the first day of the week
 - There is no indication that these Gentile believers ever thought of this day as a "sabbath" since that term only had meaning to Jews
 - Today, Christians still worship on Sundays for the most part
 - But we must be careful not to go beyond what Scripture provides concerning the meaning of that day
 - It is not a special day, much less a "sabbath"

- It was just a day that worked for the early Christians
- There is no obligation in Scripture for a believer to observe the Jewish Sabbath nor any other special day
- Paul reiterates this truth in Col 2:16:

[Col. 2:16](#) Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day —

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- Since the first day of the week was a work day in the ancient world, this worship meeting takes place at evening
 - The timing of the meeting leads to a strange incident
 - Apparently, Paul was capable of preaching for far longer than even I can, something that must be hard to believe
 - Fortunately, I've never killed anyone with my preaching...yet
 - Luke sets the scene by saying that there were many lamps lit
 - The room was upstairs in a two story building and these oil lamps would have produced smoke
 - And over time the room would have needed ventilation, so the windows would be open
 - And as young boys are want to do, he took a seat in the window sill to hear Paul
 - Paul prolongs his preaching until midnight
 - The word in Greek literally means to extend or stretch
 - Perhaps this was the perspective of the audience, that Paul was stretching his message
 - Or perhaps it was Paul's practice to give long preachings
 - Having read Paul's letters, I can't imagine growing impatient listening to him preach...what a privilege, second only to hearing the Lord Himself preaching

- In fact, some preachers have said, in all sincerity, that they view Paul's practice here as scriptural authority if not mandate to deliver long messages
- While I agree that we could all stand to have more in depth and demanding Bible teaching than we are likely to get on an average Sunday, nevertheless the book of Acts isn't a prescriptive book of theology
 - If Acts were seen to prescriptive, then we would have to conclude that it's also scripturally acceptable for our preaching to result in snoozing congregants
 - I don't think so
- Rather, we must conclude that long preaching has it's dangers, as witnessed in the fate of Eutychus
 - The boy's name is an irony of sorts, since it means "fortunate"
 - Ultimately, the boy finds a favorable outcome, but not before he experiences tragedy
 - Tired from the late hour and probably lulled by Paul's voice, the boy simply falls asleep and tumbles backward out of the window
 - The fall to the second floor kills him
 - Luke, the doctor, would have been an excellent source to record whether the boy had died, so we can take his report at face value
 - Naturally, this moment would have led to temporary chaos in the meeting
 - Women crying, men rushing to aid the boy
 - And Paul himself goes down to the boy
 - Paul then fell upon the boy
 - The word for fell in Greek is a word for embrace or press upon
 - The scene reminds us of Elijah and later Elisha laying on the body of the of the dead boys
 - Paul then announces that the boy's life is in him again
- How did Paul raise the boy from the dead?

- Obviously, Paul didn't do it of his own power; he was used by God to perform this miracle
 - Did Paul know that God would accomplish this miracle in that moment?
 - Or was it that Paul could perform this kind of miracle at will in keeping with his Apostolic authority?
 - We don't know for sure but I'm inclined to believe Paul had this ability as he felt the leading to use it
- Perhaps Paul felt some responsibility for causing it or simply mercy for the boy
 - Or he saw an opportunity to stir up the faith of this congregation and the church in Asia
 - It seems God would have used something like this in that very way
 - We get a hint of that outcome in noticing what Luke says next
 - After the revival, Paul heads back upstairs, conducts the communion meal
 - And then he preaches for another 6 hours or so!
 - Presumably, everyone gave Paul their full attention following this display of God's power
- When it ends saying they were greatly comforted, I think the intent is beyond the obvious that the boy survived
 - I believe they were comforted in seeing Paul perform this miracle, as it would have strengthened their faith in all Paul said

[Acts 20:13](#) ¶ But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land.

[Acts 20:14](#) And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.

[Acts 20:15](#) Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus.

[Acts 20:16](#) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

- Luke quickly covers Paul's journeys from Tros to Mitylene near Ephesus
 - Paul has adjusted his goal from attending Passover to attending Pentecost
 - So only a few weeks have past since Paul left Philippi
 - Paul travels by land because it was actually faster than by ship in this case due to the difficult waters in that area
 - This would have allowed Paul to spend a little longer in Troas while his companions preferred the easier journey by ship so they left earlier
 - Once Paul catches up, they sail down the coast
 - he decides he doesn't have time to stop in Ephesus and still make Pentecost
 - So they continue to Miletus

[Acts 20:17](#) ¶ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

- When the ship docks, Paul sends word to Ephesus about 20 miles up the road that the church elders should come down to the port to meet with him
 - This way Paul could deliver a message to the church without making the trip up himself
 - And Paul delivers a message in person that closely mirrors Paul's writing style, so much that it reads to us like a mini Pauline epistle

[Acts 20:18](#) And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, [Acts 20:19](#) serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; [Acts 20:20](#) how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, [Acts 20:21](#) solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. [Acts 20:22](#) "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, [Acts 20:23](#) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

[Acts 20:24](#) "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

[Acts 20:25](#) ¶ "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

[Acts 20:26](#) "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

[Acts 20:27](#) "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- Paul sets the tone of his speech in the first four verses
 - He says that from their own experiences they should know how Paul is a man of courage when it comes to preaching God's word
 - He served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials
 - Paul emphasized he was a man who operated in sincerity, not thinking too highly of himself and not profiting from his ministry
 - Rather he experienced heartache and trials and persecution
 - And Paul reminds them that nevertheless he refused to shrink back from his duty to preach
 - He never held back anything that would be profitable or from being seen publicly moving from house to house in ministry to the people
 - Then Paul looks into the future and alludes to more trouble
 - He is headed to Jerusalem,
 - And the Holy Spirit has given Paul the knowledge that he will face trouble everywhere and that trouble is growing stronger]
 - Paul didn't know the details but he must have had revelation that opposition was growing against him, and he knew that God would let it overpower him eventually
 - What a burden to carry
 - Still Paul marched on
- Paul is setting the stage here for his exhortation to the church leaders

- He wants them to emulate him and remember his example in this specific way
 - Contending with persecution and enemies of the Gospel
 - And to do so with one particularly response: preaching the truth boldly without fear or compromise
- Notice in v.24 Paul gives an important cause and effect to explain his ministry
 - Let's look at the effect first, found after the word "so"
 - Paul says he was able to finish his course and ministry given to him by Jesus
 - The ministry to preach the Gospel in all its detail
 - Remember, preaching the Gospel doesn't mean just preaching John 3:16
 - It means preaching the entire testimony of salvation, which is Gen 1 - Rev 22
 - The Gospel is the Word of God
 - Paul was able to bring a message of grace to all Asia even though he faced daily persecution and stiff opposition
 - And he traveled endless distances and endured considerable hardship
 - This was his course and he has stuck with it, as Paul says
 - Why?
- In the first half of the verse, Paul gives the cause, which enabled him to have this kind of sustained ministry in Asia
 - Paul was able to run this course as Jesus assigned it to him because Paul didn't consider his life of any account
 - You'll be interested to know that the Greek word for "account" is logos, the word
 - Paul is using a play on speech here

- He says he didn't consider his own personal life to be of much testimony or account
 - So he was able to devote himself to preaching the life of Jesus, the account of the Gospel
 - His own life was not the point and therefore it didn't cause him to hold back
 - Paul was only able to preach effectively and consistently because he wasn't interested in his own life story, his own legacy or reputation, much less saving his own skin
 - He was concerned only with the glory of God even when it meant facing death or other trials
 - The contrary, therefore, is also true
 - If we are too concerned with our life and earthly rewards, we put at risk our willingness to seek the ministry God has assigned to us
 - Paul could be a servant of Christ because he didn't serve himself
- Speaking with divine insight, Paul declares that he won't see them again
 - And Paul adds that he has no regrets nor obligations unmet
 - How can Paul be so confident that he is without blame in the exercise of his ministry?
 - The answer is simple again
 - He didn't fail in his calling to preach the entire counsel of God's word
 - I love this verse for its simplicity and clarity
 - Paul was confident he was blameless in his ministry in Asia because he said everything God told him
 - He held back nothing, the whole purpose of God
 - A better translation for purpose is counsel
 - Shouldn't that be every teacher's and preacher's goal?

- In fact, Paul's statement argues for corollary: if we fail to deliver the full counsel of God, we risk being guilty in some fashion for what comes from our work
 - After all, Paul was confident he was innocent of the blood of all men because he delivered the truth in whole
 - We should strive for the same personal testimony
- Finally, Paul moves from using his own testimony as an example to giving a warning and instructions to these leaders

[Acts 20:28](#) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

[Acts 20:29](#) "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

[Acts 20:30](#) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

[Acts 20:31](#) "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

[Acts 20:32](#) "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

[Acts 20:33](#) "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

[Acts 20:34](#) "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

[Acts 20:35](#) "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- This is classic Pauline exhortation
 - In light of the opposition to the Gospel, Paul says be on guard
 - Expect false teachers and false teaching to appear
 - It strikes me that perhaps this is the best explanation for how false teaching takes hold in any church
 - Leaders aren't guarding against it
 - They don't expect it, they don't look for it, they don't set up protections against it

- They don't enforce the protections they do have, they don't assess teachers and deal with the problems they find
- Of all the instructions Paul could have given leaders in his last meeting, Paul chose to emphasize the importance of maintaining the purity of the church's teaching
 - The one and perhaps only responsibility that distinguishes church leaders from the rest of the congregation is the unique responsibility to guard against false teaching
 - Every other duty can and should be shared with other members of a church
- Leaders are not uniquely appointed in any other way except to guard teaching
 - Jesus Himself told the first leader in the church that if he loved Jesus, he must feed Jesus' sheep
- Paul says they must be on guard over teaching if they are to do their jobs well as leaders
- We know from Jesus' letter to this church in Revelation, He commends the church in Ephesus for not tolerating false teachers
 - So it seems the leaders heed Paul's warning
- Finally, Paul leaves them with a commendation and reminder
 - Paul says the word of God will edify them and lead them into an inheritance
 - That their faith to the word brings its own rewards, including eternal rewards
 - Then Paul reminds the church that he didn't come with a selfish financial interest himself
 - In fact, Paul took care of himself through the work of his own hands
 - Even taking care of those who traveled with him
 - Again, setting an example for others to follow

- Finally, Paul uses this opportunity to reinforce the need to be charitable and willing to help believers in need
 - Paul was likely seeking donations for Jerusalem even as he had this meeting with the Elders
 - He quotes Jesus, though the quote doesn't exist anywhere else in Scripture, so it must have been left for Paul to record it
- And so Paul leaves for Jerusalem with the elders mourning his departure

[Acts 20:36](#) ¶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

[Acts 20:37](#) And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,

[Acts 20:38](#) grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.