

Saved by Grace

Week Commencing 12 June 2023

Notes for next week's sermon on Acts 19 – Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian elders

DAY 1: Read Acts 20:1-6

When the uproar had ended – v1 – when public order had been restored to the city, Paul sent for the disciples to come to him. Perhaps he was still in hiding. After encouraging them, he said good-bye – no doubt urging them to remain loyal to Christ in spite of continuing persecution and 'to live a life worthy of their calling' as God's new and holy people.

Paul then set out for Macedonia, intending to catch up with Timothy and Erastus, who he had sent off ahead of him (19:22). After three months in Greece, he went back through Macedonia because of some plotting by some Jews. Eventually, he ended up in Troas where he stayed for a week. This is in modern day Turkey and was situated on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea and bordered by the Dardanelles Strait (ancient Hellespont) to the northwest. Troas was a significant cultural and commercial centre. It gained importance as a major port and trade hub due to its strategic location between Europe and Asia.

Why are we told about these travels and places in the book of Acts? Because Luke wants us to know this is not a made-up tale! We know about these towns and places from other sources in history. This gives us great assurance that we are reading a reliable and true account of 1st century events! And we are privileged to see the Lord at work! Thank the Lord today for the reliability of his Word and rejoice in all we are reading from the book of Acts.

DAY 2: Read Acts 20:7-12

Luke only records one incident during this week in Troas, namely the dramatic sleep, fall and resuscitation of a young man named Eutychus.

Here we read the earliest unambiguous evidence for the Christian practice of gathering for worship on the first day of the week – i.e.; Sunday. We also see that the purpose of their assembly was to 'break bread' which Luke understood as the Lord's Supper in the context of a fellowship meal, as in the upper room in Jerusalem. There was instruction from Paul as part of the gathering – though it was a prolonged exhortation, continuing until midnight!

It is evident that Luke was with them (by the reference to 'we'), so what we read here is first-hand from Luke as eyewitness. Presumably it was an evening gathering and was held in a private residence on the third floor (v9). Presumably because of the many lamps, the room became quite stuffy, and it was probably for this reason, Eutychus is seated at a window and again for the same reason, that he became sleepy. *He fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.* ¹⁰ *Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"* ¹¹ *Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.* ¹² *The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

Without a doubt, the young man had died. Paul's statement in v10: "he's alive" does not mean he is still alive despite his disastrous fall, but that as a result of Paul embracing him, he had come alive again! This an amazing and wonderful miracle, and another living demonstration of the gospel of Jesus who brings dead people to life! Thank the Lord today, that you who were once dead, have now been made alive in Christ!

DAY 3: Read Acts 20:13-24

On arrival in Miletus, Paul sent for the Ephesian elders. Although only 48kms from Miletus in a straight line, the trip to Ephesus and back by a rather circuitous road would have taken close to a week. Miletus was an ancient Greek city located on the western coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), in the region known as Ionia. It was one of the most important and prosperous cities in the ancient world during the 1st century and earlier.

Paul's address is very moving and wonderful. It is addressed to 'elders' (v17), 'pastors' (v28) and 'overseers' (v 28b), but it is clear that these are all interchangeable terms for the same people. This speech is recognisably Pauline, in that many of the themes are taken up in his letters.

A whole year may have elapsed from when Paul first left Ephesus and the meeting he called here with the elders, so, Paul reminds them about how he lived among them. He appealed to their memory, especially of his humility, his tears, his testings on account of the Jews and his faithful preaching-teaching ministry, in public and in private, in which he concentrated on the need for both Jews and Gentiles to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus.

He shared that the Holy Spirit is compelling him to journey up to Jerusalem, even in the face of certain hardships he is sure to face. We recall Jesus' journey, setting out for Jerusalem; also in the certain knowledge that hardships awaited him there! However Paul's aim does not centre around survival but finishing the race and completing his Christ-given task of bearing witness to the good news of God's grace. Nothing else matters to Paul. A life lived merely for his own purposes, is worth nothing to him!

What about you? Can you say that today? Yes, Paul was a very special minister of God in the first century – but surely there is a sense in which every Christian is to count their life as nothing, except for testifying to the good news of God's grace. It is a good time for you to reflect – 'how important is that task to me?'

DAY 4: Read Acts 20:25-38

As Paul's address ends, we see:

1. Paul's faithfulness to his mission: In these verses, Paul reflects on his ministry among the Ephesians. He emphasises that he has faithfully proclaimed the whole counsel of God to them, not holding back anything that was profitable for their spiritual growth. Paul's commitment to fulfilling his calling as an apostle and spreading the Gospel is evident in his words.
2. Paul's concern for the Ephesian church: As Paul bids farewell, he expresses his deep concern for the Ephesian believers. He warns them about the potential threats they will face, both from false teachers and from divisions that may arise within the church. He urges them to remain vigilant, to be watchful, and to care for one another.
3. Paul's humility and example of service: Paul reminds the elders of his own example of selflessness and service. He recalls that he worked tirelessly, supporting himself and those with him, and he did not seek personal gain or exploit the believers. Paul's humility and sacrificial attitude serve as an inspiration and model for the Ephesian leaders and the entire church.
4. Paul's anticipation of future challenges: Paul prophetically foretells that after his departure, grievous wolves will come in among them, distorting the truth and causing division. He emphasises the importance of being rooted in sound doctrine and remaining steadfast in the face of such challenges.
5. Emotional farewell and prayer: The farewell speech concludes with an emotional scene, as Paul prays with the Ephesian elders and bids them farewell. The believers weep and embrace Paul, recognising that they will no longer see him in person. This poignant moment reflects the deep bond between Paul and the Ephesian church and highlights the strong relationships that were formed through their shared faith.

Overall, this passage captures Paul's dedication to his mission, his concern for the Ephesian believers, his humility, and his anticipation of future challenges. It serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of remaining faithful to the Gospel, being vigilant against false teachings, and loving and caring for one another within the Christian community.

For those churches in our diocese who currently have a minister: can I ask you two questions: do you sense their love for you? Does it match the love we see here between pastor and elder? My great sense is that ALL our current clergy, love you, their people! If this be true – trust them to lead and guide you – even when you may disagree with them.

Second question: Do you love them? Would they know that? What practical steps can you take to show your appreciation for them? How might you encourage them, support them, and assure them of your love?

Resources: The Message of Acts by John Stott