

Concluding Events of Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts 20

Acts 20:1-12: *"After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. ² Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece ³ and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. ⁵ These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. ⁶ But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.*

⁷ Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. ⁹ And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." ¹¹ Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. ¹² And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted."

Background Notes

Acts 19 is the record of Paul's ministry at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. For more than two years Paul lectured and had discussions daily at the "school of Tyrannus." As a result, many interested people heard the Word of the Lord - both Jews and Gentiles, who lived in or were passing through Ephesus. During this time, *"all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks"* (Acts 19:10). "Asia" was the Roman province of Asia, part of the country of Turkey today.

While Paul was at Ephesus, God did some extraordinary miracles through him. Many people came to faith in Jesus Christ, and a great revival took place. Lives were changed, and new believers burned all their idols and occult materials. The gospel was making tremendous inroads in the city of Ephesus! As a result, some of the businesses associated with the worship at the great temple of the pagan goddess Artemis began to lose money. The owners created a great riot that was finally quelled by the city clerk.

When the uproar ceased, Paul decided to move on from Ephesus to Macedonia. His purpose was to preach and teach the Word, to encourage the believers, and to take up a collection to bring back to the Jerusalem church and the needy

saints there. 2 Corinthians says that Paul stopped at Troas before he got to Macedonia. After visiting the Macedonian churches (including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea), Paul moved on to Greece, which would have included Corinth.

Doctrinal Points

1. Staying flexible is important in the work of the Lord.

Throughout Paul's ministry, we see that he was able to "flex" if conditions changed. He could "roll with the punches." He could change his itinerary. He could adapt and adjust to new and different situations. We certainly see that in the first section of this chapter.

When Paul planned to return by boat to his home base, Antioch of Syria, he learned about a plot against him – perhaps a plan to kill him at sea and dump his body overboard. So what did he do? He changed his plans, and instead he went back through Macedonia by land, sending the rest of the team ahead of him to wait at Troas. Meanwhile, he picked up Luke at Philippi. (Notice that the "us" and "we" pronouns begin again in Acts here in verses 5-6.) Luke had spent the last six to seven years at Philippi (see Acts 15).

Another situation in which Paul was flexible is found in verses 6-12. Paul was in Troas, and on the first day of the week he met with the believers to remember the Lord. The group met at night in an upper room. While Paul "talked on and on," a young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window. He dozed off, fell out of the window and was killed. [This passage of Scripture has always been encouraging to me - not only because Eutychus was raised back to life, but because even the preaching of the great apostle Paul couldn't keep everyone awake!]

Notice how Paul stayed flexible after this remarkable event. After the Lord raised Eutychus from the dead, Paul and the other believers went back upstairs, had a snack, and then Paul continued to teach with them until dawn of the next day! Just "another day at the office" for the apostle Paul! Staying flexible is important in the work of the Lord.

2. Being efficient is important in the work of the Lord.

Acts 20:13-17: *"Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. ¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵ We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Chios. The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next day we came to Miletus. 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 at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. ¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church."*

Rather than sailing from Troas to Assos, Paul sent the team ahead by boat. He decided that he would hike the twenty

miles overland so that he could stay on a little longer teaching the believers at Troas. Not being subject to the sailing time set by the boat's captain, but saving valuable time by walking – that was efficiency in the ministry! Then, instead of stopping at Ephesus where he would surely be delayed, Paul efficiently stopped at Miletus, about thirty miles south of Ephesus. He then sent word to the elders of the church at Ephesus to join him there for a conference.

It's amazing how much more can be done for the Lord when we diligently work at being efficient with our scheduling, and our itinerary, and our budgeting of time and money. Being efficient is important in the work of the Lord!

3. Encouraging elders is important in the work of the Lord.

Acts 20:17-32: *“And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

²⁵ “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.³² “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

These verses contain some important doctrine about elders. First of all, notice that there was **more than one elder** in the church at Ephesus. There was not just one elder, or one minister, or one pastor. The Bible teaches that there should be a plurality of elders.

Secondly, it's clear that there is **no difference between the offices** of elder, or bishop (overseer), or pastor. All three terms are used interchangeably to indicate the same individuals (v28). Paul was addressing the elders of the church of Ephesus, and he also referred to them as bishops/overseers and pastors.

Another point of doctrine about elders here is that **the Holy Spirit selects elders** - not the local church by popular vote. It is the church's responsibility to **recognize** the elders that the Holy Spirit is calling to this great work.

Paul encouraged the elders at Ephesus by reminding them that even though false teachers would arise, the church of God would go on, and that the Lord would strengthen them and build them up for the job (v32.) We too should encourage our church's elders – it's a heavy responsibility. Encouraging elders is important in the work of the Lord.

4. Setting the example is important in the work of the Lord.

Acts 20:33-35: *"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵ I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

Paul wasn't "tooting his own horn" here! He was exhorting the Ephesian elders to follow his example, and to be models themselves. This message is still important today.

Don't go into any kind of ministry for money or "perks"! Be willing to "make tents" to meet your needs and the needs of others! Help the spiritually and physically weak! Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

In other words, the bottom line in serving the Lord is **not** what you get out of church or get out of your fellowship, or even get out of your Christian life – but **what you give!** Setting the example is important in the work of the Lord.

Practical Application

Pray a parting prayer.

Acts 20:36-38: *"And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, ³⁸ sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship."* This was a very emotional scene. Paul was about to depart, and the elders realized that they might never see their spiritual father again in this earthly life. It's not wrong to be emotional - and to show your emotions – especially at times like this. According to Ecclesiastes 3:4, there is a time to cry.

Before Paul parted, he knelt down and prayed with these men. Parting prayer is always a good thing – whether it's before a long journey, or before separation from friends, or departure for a mission trip - or *any* other parting. Gather the group for prayer by saying something like, *"Let's pray together"* or asking someone to *"commend us to the Lord as we part."* That's certainly following a biblical pattern. So - pray a parting prayer!