

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #45

Acts 20:1-12

Church history is fascinating to read. It is interesting to track the movements of those who did big things for God. For example, John Calvin preached a message in Paris in 1533 that so rubbed the Catholic church the wrong way that he had to leave the city. He moved from city to city; Strasburg, Basel and Ferrara. He decided to go back to Strasburg and stopped in a city called Geneva and it was in Geneva where God caused him to become the great Swiss Reformer. Now God was using Dr. Calvin everywhere he went, but when he got to Geneva, Calvin was used at his greatest level.

When our world seems to fall completely apart and it seems that we are hit with one negative thing after another, we may find great strength in knowing that God is still sovereign. The fact is He may be sovereignly leading us to the greatest blessings of our lives and ministries. That is certainly what God did in the life of the Apostle Paul.

Almost everywhere Paul went he seemed to end up in some sort of trouble. Life for him was not easy. But often times the trouble was used by God to direct Paul somewhere else where he was powerfully used in some dramatic ways. Never is that point more evident than when we come to this part of Acts. What we see is this:

WHEN OUR WORLD SEEMS LIKE IT IS FALLING APART, WE MAY FIND GREAT COMFORT IN THE FACT THAT GOD MAY BE DIRECTING US TO THE GREATEST BLESSINGS OF OUR LIVES IN WHICH WE WILL SEE HIM USE US IN SOME VERY DRAMATIC WAYS.

The seeming setbacks in our world are still under the control of our Sovereign God who controls all things in our world. That very point is certainly seen as Paul was about to end his third missionary journey.

According to **Acts 20:1**, it was time for Paul to leave Ephesus. The big uproar had calmed down so he sent for all the Ephesian believers and he “exhorted” them and took off for Europe (Macedonia) to check up on the churches. That participle “exhort” (παρακαλεσας), which shows up in this verse and the next, is one that means Paul took a specific moment in time (aorist tense) and called the people together and gave them an encouraging and comforting message from God’s Word (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 340). Persecution did not stop Paul from preaching and teaching.

According to **verse 2**, he passed through all of the regions in between Ephesus and Greece doing the same thing. He taught much in every place he went. In fact, some believe that Paul spent about a year in Macedonia communicating God’s Word to places like Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Then, finally he came to Greece.

Now according to **verse 3**, he spent three months there in Corinth and apparently a major plot arose among the Jews to kill him on a ship, which would have taken him back to his home church in Syria.

So Paul changed his plans. He decided to take off and go back north to Macedonia and revisit the European churches he had just visited on his way to Greece. **God, in His sovereignty, saw to it that Paul learned about this plot and God had Paul change his plans.** He decided rather than take a ship to Syria he would head back up into Macedonia. Paul didn't let the setback faze him in any way.

Now at this point Paul's ministry is beginning to wind down. In this 20th chapter, Paul's primary focus is to revisit established churches and not plant new churches. We are now moving to the finale of Paul's life and he will spend much of his final days in places he had already been and with people he already knew. What many of these churches do not realize is that this will be the last time they will ever see Paul until they see him again in heaven. He was actually personally teaching them for a final time.

According to **verse 4**, Paul was traveling with Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy of Lystra and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. But he had sent them on ahead to Troas where they were to wait for Paul and Luke (**verse 5**). One reason why he had such a large team was that he was carrying a very large sum of money back to the church in Jerusalem. He had collected an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem and this team was acting as Paul's bodyguards.

According to **verse 6**, when Paul and Luke finally ended up in Philippi they ("we") sailed from Philippi to Troas, which took five days to do. We may remember that when Paul first went to Macedonia, sailing from Troas the trip only took two days (16:11). That first trip was an east to west trip. But this trip was a west to east trip and one would think that the winds would be more favorable in a west to east trip. So this does show the power of God when He literally caused the winds to get them there in two days on the first trip and five days on the return trip. I truly believe God gave Paul some time to just rest and relax on the return trip. During those five days of travel, I am sure Paul reflected on what God had done with his life and he probably knew he was not going back.

Now it is when Paul gets to Troas that one of the most amazing things of Paul's apostolic career takes place. There is a stupendous demonstration of God's miraculous power that occurs. This happens in Troas and there are six facts God reveals:

TROAS FACT #1 – Paul and his team stayed in Troas seven days. **20:6**

We must assume that Paul carefully taught the Scriptures every day for a week. Now most people had jobs during the day, so we may assume that Paul conducted a week of meetings with a few here and a few there. Sunday was the big day when the believers held church.

TROAS FACT #2 – Paul met with the believers on the first day of the week. **20:7a**

Now there is something to see here about the early church; they met on Sunday, not on Saturday and you can prove that right here. Jewish people calculated that a new day began at sundown. A Sabbath was from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday and the new day began at sundown on Saturday night. Notice here the calculation is Roman calculation, which is what we use today. A new day starts at midnight. The text says that they met on the first day of the week and it was the first day of the week until midnight, which means this church met on Sunday.

It is true that Paul would often go to a Jewish synagogue on Saturday to address the Jews, but **the Apostolic Church met on Sunday, the first day of the week. They did not worship on the Sabbath Day.** As Dr. C.I. Scofield observed, “The early churches were specifically warned against submitting themselves to the bondage of any legalistic observance of Sabbath days (Col. 2:16, compare Gal. 4:9-11)” (*Scofield Bible Note from Acts 20:7*). Dr. Scofield goes on to say that the observance of the first day of the week as the day of Christian worship is corroborated by all the early church fathers—Barabas, Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.

Now I know that many of you have been raised in a system that taught you that Sunday was the Sabbath Day. It is not and it was not. Christians got together on Sunday, the first day of the week and we still do this to this very day.

TROAS FACT #3 – The believers met together to break bread and be taught God’s Word. **20:7b-8**

I want you to notice the simplicity of worship here. They did not meet to hold a Mass. They did not meet to hear a choir. It doesn’t even say they met to have fellowship, although they certainly would enjoy that. They met to break bread, which means to focus on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and to be taught the Word of God. On Sunday, the first day of the week, God’s people of the apostolic churches gathered to focus on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and to hear God’s Word.

Now it is very obvious from this very passage that the majority of time at church was spent listening to Paul expound God’s Word. In fact, the text says that Paul was intending to leave the next day so he decided to preach until about midnight. Now the people all jammed into that room to hear the Word of God. It was standing room only to hear God’s Word. No big show, no big stage production, just come and listen to the Word of God.

According to **verse 8** there were many lamps in a very large upper room that must have been three stories high. Now some believe it is possible to actually identify this upper room. Many think this was the home of Carpus who lived in Troas because when Paul left, he apparently left his coat there (II Tim. 4:13).

Why the emphasis on many lamps (v. 8)? Here are four good possibilities:

- 1) To show this was not some secretive meeting. It was open to the public.
- 2) To protect the purity of this meeting—everything lit up and out in the open.
- 3) To show that everyone could see what actually happened to Eutychus.
- 4) To permit God's people to be able to see to take notes concerning Paul's expositions.

TROAS FACT #4 – A young man named Eutychus falls asleep and falls out a window and is killed. **20:9**

Now I admire this young man Eutychus. The word “young” means he was just a youth (Smith, p. 300). They didn't have some fancy youth program or children's ministry; he was a young man who wanted to hear God's Word and he was at this meeting sitting on a window ledge just to hear Paul preach. Since Paul was preaching until midnight (v. 7), he had listened to Paul preach and teach for hours.

Now if I preached until midnight, I would expect all of you to fall asleep. Some of you have a hard time not sleeping when I preach 35-40 minutes. But if the Apostle Paul were here preaching, not too many would doze off.

The thing that is so fascinating about this story is that Eutychus is a well-known figure in the Scriptures and he is best known for falling asleep during a sermon. But this is no ordinary falling asleep. **First**, he falls asleep during a message by the Apostle Paul; **second**, he falls asleep and falls out of a three story window; **third**, he falls asleep and ends up dead.

As S. Lewis Johnson said Eutychus becomes the great patron saint of all “sermon sleepers” in the audience. He is the first known person to fall asleep at church. He will not be the last. Thousands have followed him but only his name is remembered.

I heard of one brother who said to another brother, “how late do you sleep on Sunday morning?” He said, “it depends on how boring the message is.” I read a story of a woman who was having trouble with insomnia. She could not sleep at night. She had gone to a doctor and he had tried everything he could and every medicine he could to get her to sleep, but it didn't work. Finally, the woman said “take me to church, I've slept soundly there for forty years and I think I can go back to sleep just as soon as the minister starts preaching.”

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said that he heard of a man who came late to a service and he whispered to the man next to him, “how long has this man been preaching?” The man said he has been preaching for 30-40 years. The man said, “I'll stay then, he must almost be done.”

Kent Hughes told the story of a minister who had an elder in his church who fell asleep during the sermon. The elder's job was to pronounce the benediction on the sermon and when his wife nudged him to wake up, he stood up and pronounced the benediction. The only trouble was it was in the middle of the pastor's message (*Acts*, p. 271).

Well Paul would not have been boring. His preaching and teaching would not put you to sleep.

It was powerful. When we track his message he does not seem to spend a lot of time discussing the life of Jesus Christ, but he does spend a lot of time discussing the ramifications and the theology of His death and resurrection. He certainly taught justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

Now you will notice from **verse 8** that there were many lamps lit and they were not real bright lamps. A lamp was a saucer type bowl, with a narrow finger that contained a wick. Most burned olive oil for fuel. What that means is that there were many people in the room and lots of lamps. Now we know that when you get a lot of people in one room it makes the room warmer. Furthermore, Troas sits on the Aegean Sea and the warm, humid sea breezes can leave you a bit sleepy. I can just see the lamps with the shadows and young Eutychus was sitting on a window ledge listening and learning and his eyelids began to get heavy and finally he shut his eyes and fell asleep. The interesting thing is you would think Paul would be completely exhausted, but it isn't Paul who is exhausted, it is this young man.

Now Eutychus was a very spiritually-minded young man and he wanted to hear Paul preach. Keep in mind this story is being recorded by a medical doctor. Dr. Luke is writing this story down and he specifically points out the young man went into a "deep sleep." The words "deep sleep" (*υπνος*) means this was a very deep, hypnotic sleep. My old psychology professor would call this "stage four delta sleep," which is characterized by slow, even brain waves.

Eutychus dozed off, fell into a deep sleep and fell out of a three story window and he ended up dead. It is spiritually true if you fall asleep in the things of God your spiritual life can end up dead. But this young man literally ended up physically dead.

Now remember again that Luke is a medical doctor (Col. 4:14) and he was there and he points out that the condition of this young man was beyond medical help. He was actually dead. There was nothing any medical doctor could do.

Before we move on, we must admit that this does raise an interesting contemporary question—Why do people fall asleep at church?

- 1) Because the minister is boring and preaches too long. I read of one minister who was so boring the members of the church told him he could only preach for nine minutes.
- 2) Because people have come to church after working all night. They love God and don't want to miss.
- 3) Because people have never been awake to the things of God or Word of God.
- 4) Because people are carnal to the things of God and don't care and are in church for other reasons than hearing God's Word.
- 5) Because people did not prepare themselves for worship on Saturday night. They stayed up too late, not for any good reason and miss the full impact of what God's Spirit could have done.

However, the most dangerous and scariest potential of all is for a soul to be asleep without Christ. If you are here today at church and do not believe on Jesus Christ, you are in danger of eternal death.

What steps can we take to not fall asleep at church?

- 1) Carefully consider that when God's Word is preached it is God speaking to you through His Word.
- 2) Pray and ask God to speak to you and help you glean what He wants you to glean.

TROAS FACT #5 – Paul miraculously restores the young man back to life. **20:10**

Keep in mind that Dr. Luke was right there when this happened and there was no way Luke could do what the Apostle Paul was about to do. Those religious con men who claim they have raised someone from the dead or that they know one of their charismatic friends who did it are liars. If Dr. Luke, Paul's companion could not do this, they certainly cannot.

There are two O.T. prophets who brought dead people back to life. One was Elijah, who brought the widow's son back to life (I Kings 17:17-24) and the other was Elisha, who brought the Shunammite's son back to life (II Kings 4:18-37). In both of those instances the prophets laid on the child. In a very similar apostolic action, Paul did exactly the same thing and the life came back to Eutychus.

The purpose of this miracle was to validate the truthfulness of the apostle's message of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Everywhere Paul went people wanted him dead and these apostolic sign gifts validated his message and ministry.

TROAS FACT #6 – Paul taught them several more hours and then left. **20:11**

Paul went back upstairs and taught until daybreak. He had only planned to go until midnight, but this miracle had revived the whole group. In fact, according to **verse 12**, they took the boy away and all were rejoicing. Can you imagine the blessing some believer would have missed if they would have stayed home from church that day? Not only would they have missed one of the greatest miracles God performed, but they would have missed the teaching of God's Word by the greatest apostle God ever saved.

Paul was leaving these areas for good and one of the greatest moments of his apostolic career occurred right here with a young boy. Those true apostolic churches were formed on the foundation of careful teaching of God's Word. Every Sunday the people went to church to hear the Scriptures taught and may we never fall asleep to this reality.