

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 24

Paul's Third Missionary Journey Concluded

When we last left the narrative on Paul, he was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. It was from Ephesus that Paul wrote the letter we call First Corinthians. We know that Paul left Ephesus and traveled back to Corinth and through Macedonia. This was the time that Paul wrote the letters we have recently studied, Second Corinthians and Romans. Luke's history (Acts) does not provide great detail of this time. Luke simply notes that Paul left Ephesus "for Macedonia." Luke then adds, "When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece" (Acts 20:2).

We do not have a lot of detail of the time involved, nor do we have much information of what Paul was doing. We do see a consistency of Paul going back and strengthening churches he had previously started. Paul did that over and over again with the heart of a shepherd as well as a missionary.

Paul spent three months in Greece and was planning to sail back to Syria when a plot against his life caused him to change plans. Instead Paul took an overland route through Macedonia. In verses 4-5 of Acts chapter 20, we read an interesting personal note. Luke adds in verse 4:

"Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus."

Most scholars believe these men were the churches' representatives going to Jerusalem with Paul taking their collection for the needy in Jerusalem. Paul had referenced this in his letters, even though Luke does not go into detail about it. The interesting personal note comes from the way the representatives are ordered. Luke sets them in geographical regions starting with Berea. (Berea and Thessalonica are Macedonia; Derbe and the home for Timothy are Galatia; and then the Asians are listed). A major church center skipped in this ordering is the church at Philippi. It should have followed Thessalonica.

What happened to Philippi? We know from Paul's later letter to the church that they were wonderful givers and supporters of Paul's efforts (Phil. 4:15, etc.). It seems odd that they were not among the givers who sent a representative to Jerusalem with Paul. We must read a bit deeper!

We need to return to where we last read of Philippi in Acts 17. Actually we should return even a bit earlier to Acts 16 where Paul was in Troas about to leave for Macedonia and Philippi. In Acts 16:10 Luke quit writing of what “they” did (“they” meaning Paul and his companions) and started writing about what “we” did. Scholars call this one of the “we” passages in Acts. The “we” reflects Luke joining Paul’s team. Luke continued with Paul into Macedonia and Philippi. It was in Philippi where Luke stayed as Paul departed. Luke then returns to his third person narrative writing of what “they” did.

Now as Paul returns through Macedonia with his group detailed by Luke in Acts 20:4 we are faced with an apparent conspicuous absence of a Philippian representative in the group. But we find the representative in verse 5! Luke, who had left Paul’s entourage by staying behind in Philippi, rejoins the group as they pass through Macedonia (Philippi) no doubt bringing his churches contribution with him! In Acts 20:5 Luke writes, “These went on ahead and were waiting for *us* at Troas.”

So Luke rejoins Paul and stays with him through the trip to Jerusalem. No doubt this journey, and the many contacts made during it, would provide the first hand reliable sources where Luke would get much of the history he included in the Gospel of Luke! It is not surprising that Luke begins providing precise details about the trip at this point. We read of each island passed in sailing as well as specific time entries like, “in five days we came... we stayed for seven days... On the first day of the week... etc.”

TROAS AND EUTYCHUS

Luke as a first hand witness renders the accounts of Paul at this point. Luke was in Troas where Paul stayed seven days. It was in Troas where Paul gathered with the church in a third story room to break bread and teach. Paul taught... and taught... and taught. In fact, he “prolonged his speech until midnight.”

If we take a moment to consider the scene in light of what we know about those times in contrast to today, several matters come to light. First, the fact that it was a three story structure did not necessarily mean that a wealthy family lived there, in the sense a three story house might today. Witherington explains that the wealthier families would have entertained on the ground floor. The higher floors were apartments that went to those of lesser means and social standing.¹

¹ See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans 1998) at 607. An interesting side note, it was not until the invention of the elevator that upper storied apartments became more valuable and costly than those of the lower floors! A big trip to the grocery store with a lot of groceries to lug up stairs readily illustrates why!

Luke notes, “There were many lamps in the upper room.” Those lamps were necessary for lighting. They would typically burn off olive oil leaving a pungent aroma. Bruce writes,

“The hot, oily atmosphere caused by the crowd and the torches made it difficult for one who had put in a hard day’s work to keep awake, despite the priceless opportunity of learning truth from apostolic lips.”²

Understanding the scene, we are not surprised that as Paul extended his speech until midnight, a young man named Eutychus (his name, by the way, means “lucky” or “good fortune”) fell asleep listening. Paul kept talking and Eutychus fell deeper and deeper into sleep.³

Eutychus was sitting in a window while sleeping and he fell out of the window to the ground three stories below. Luke the physician is there, but a doctor was of no use to Eutychus. The young man was dead.

Paul went down to the street and cradled Eutychus in his arms. God restored life to the young man and Paul was able to proclaim, “Stop making a fuss! His life is in him.”⁴ Paul then returned upstairs for the meal and then continued to “converse”⁵ until daybreak, at which point Paul left Troas.

MILETUS AND THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Paul went then to Miletus, about 30 miles from Ephesus. From Miletus Paul summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul feared going into Ephesus itself lest he be unable to pull himself away in time to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Once the elders arrived, Paul gave an incredible “good bye” speech that Luke records in some detail. In the speech Paul recounts his actions in Ephesus as well as his mission efforts in general.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 373.

³ In the Greek text, Luke changes his verb tenses on the sleep in a way that our translation does not fully capture. In verse 9, the ESV states Eutychus “sank into a deep sleep” and he was “overcome by sleep.” The first phrase is better translated “dropping off to sleep” followed by Paul’s continued teaching with Eutychus then “being sound asleep.” See Bruce at 373.

⁴ Bruce captures the verb tense and translation and so we use his clause here. *Ibid.*

⁵ While the ESV translates, “he conversed with them a long time, until daybreak” (Acts 20:11) what Paul was doing was preaching. The Greek word translated “converse” is *homilesas* (ὁμιλήσας) from which we get “homily.” When Jerome translated the Greek into Latin he used the Latin word *sermo*, which over time has developed into our modern word “sermon.”

As we consider Paul's speech, it is interesting to do so in light of the letters Paul had recently written (1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans) as well as those that will soon follow. We see in Paul's speech many phrases and ideas that are echoed in those letters. No doubt these were thoughts that were current in Paul's teachings and vocabulary at that phase of his life. We also see several phrases and words that are classic Luke in New Testament usage. This is also not surprising in light of Luke's presence at the time and his own likely note taking while Paul was speaking. We see Luke taking Paul's ideas and expressing some verbatim while others he put into Luke's, no doubt shortened, vocabulary! (We have no indication that Paul preached this sermon all night!)

Paul begins by reminding the elders of his actions and attitudes while on his mission trip. Paul echoes Romans 1:1 ("a servant of Christ Jesus") and 12:11 ("serve the Lord") as he tells the elders, "You yourselves know how I lived among you ... serving the Lord with all humility and with tears." The humility is something Paul valued so highly he had recently included it in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:1 "I who am humble" and 11:7 "did I commit a sin in humbling myself"). Of course in the same Corinthian letter we are reminded Paul had written a previous letter that he termed one of "many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4).

Paul's speech contains many other references that track those of his writings, and the reader is referred to most any good commentary to find those. Paul detailed the problems that he faced in his efforts to teach the Ephesians both publicly and privately through the house churches. Paul taught of repentance (a Luke word much more so than a Paul word, although Paul certainly taught repentance⁶) and faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul told the elders that he was going to Jerusalem. Paul was under no illusions about what he would face. God had prepared Paul that imprisonment and suffering were before him. Paul really did not care about his own life, however. Paul wished only to finish the course God had set before him testifying to the good news of Christ's death for humanity's sin. Paul knew, because of what was coming, that he would not again see these elders, among whom he lived and worked for three years.

⁶ We find Paul using some form of the word only five times in his 13 letters (Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 12:21 and 2 Timothy 2:25). Luke uses the word almost two dozen times in Luke-Acts (Luke 3:3, 3:8, 5:32, 10:13, 11:32, 13:1, 13:3, 13:5, 15:7, 15:10, 16:30, 17:3, 17:4, 24:47 and Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 13:24, 17:30, 19:4, 20:21, and 26:20). That does not, of course, mean that repentance was only a Lucan concept. For example, Paul taught the church to turn from idols (see 1 Thess. 1:9; Rom. 10:9). Repentance is God's call for humanity expressed in the teachings of Christ and his church. But the word used (*metanoia* *μετάνοιαν* a turning of the mind) is more peculiarly Luke's rather than Paul.

Paul charged the elders to pay special attention to their own responsibilities. Just as Paul had properly discharged his calling by faithfully declaring the whole counsel of God's word, the elders were to pay special attention not only to each other but moreover to the church. The Holy Spirit made the Elders overseers of the church and that was a significant responsibility.

“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:27-28).

Paul was certain that Satan would attack the church both from within and without and the elders were to remember that God had spent his own blood for the church; the elders should be ready to spend nothing less!

Paul then charged the elders to be alert, to remember Paul's tears and his 24/7 teaching and care. Paul commended the elders “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 20:32). After reminding the elders that Paul himself worked among them to support himself and his ministry, Paul urges that they *see* the sermon; that they see that hard work is good, as is helping the weak through giving.

After Paul addressed the elders, they knelt down and prayed together. There were a lot of tears and hugs; especially over knowing they would not see Paul again. Paul then boarded his ship and sailed towards Jerusalem.

JERUSALEM

Luke gives specific details about the sailing journey as the group stopped at various islands on the way toward Jerusalem, including a one-week stop in Tyre. The sailing journey finally ended at Caesarea where the group stayed at the house of “Philip the evangelist.”

We should remember at this point that Luke had started his history of Luke-Acts assuring his reader that his “orderly account” was based on the events delivered by “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2-3). We add that here because Luke is with Paul during this stay at the home of Philip the evangelist in Caesarea, where Philip lived with his four daughters who “prophesied.”⁷ This is the same

⁷ Although they do not figure prominently in this story, we are remiss if we fail to mention the significant role Philip's daughters played in the early church. History teaches us that they were

Philip that Luke would write of in Acts 8. Philip himself no doubt related the Acts 8 account of Philip to Luke!

It was Philip who had received instruction from God to go on a certain road where Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah. Philip had the joy of sharing the gospel and baptizing this eunuch before Philip “came to Caesarea” where Paul, Luke and others found and stayed with Philip (Acts 8:40).

Paul had not been long at Philip’s when a prophet named Agabus comes to visit.⁸ In classic Old Testament fashion, Agabus delivers not only a verbal prophecy, but a visual one as well.⁹ Agabus took Paul’s belt and tied his own hands and feet declaring that Paul would also be bound and tied by the Jews in Jerusalem delivered then into the hands of the Gentiles. The Christians who saw and heard Agabus began urging Paul to abandon his plans to go to Jerusalem.

Paul was not so easily persuaded. He had set his face to Jerusalem and would not be deterred. Paul told the group, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus!” (Acts 21:13). The expression Paul uses gets lost a bit in the translation “breaking my heart.” Paul literally says, “pounding my heart the way one pounds clothes upon the rocks when washing them.” Paul was concerned only with God’s will, not the will of anyone less! So we are not surprised when Luke tells us that Paul and his group got ready and headed out on the 64 mile trek to Jerusalem.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Eutychus, Mr. Lucky! The patron saint of all who have struggled at times to keep their eyes opened during church!

Where did he earn his name? Where do we find his good fortune? No doubt the greatest achievement of his life was the incredible opportunity to hear the apostle Paul deliver a sermon first hand. Yet he missed much of it; he fell asleep! If that is not bad enough, he then had the

instrumental in teaching the next generation of believers the accounts of what had happened in the life of Christ and the early church. Eusebius (c. 260-339 AD), a historian of the church writing several hundred years after Luke Quotes the Acts passage and then notes several church fathers who received stories of the early church from Philip’s daughters. See Eusebius, *The Church History* Book 3:31 ff.

⁸ We wonder if it was from this visit that Luke received a first hand account of Agabus coming to Antioch prophesying the coming famine as recounted in Acts 11:27-28.

⁹ See, for example, the story of Ahijah in 1 Kings 11:29-39, Isaiah’s actions in Isaiah 20, etc.

whole episode written up for eternity in the word of God! Bless his heart; Luke does not even give him the blessing of anonymity. Luke gives us his name and location! Of course we doubt that Eutyclus was quiet about the episode either. Surely his whole life consisted of recounting the embarrassing episode followed by the miracle of God restoring his life through the care of Paul. Who among us cannot see the humor and beauty of God working in our weaknesses to bring about his message and kingdom? From Paul's thorn in the flesh, he was acutely aware that God's "grace is sufficient." God's "power is made perfect in weakness." In fact, for this reason Paul said, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses" (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

2. Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders.

This touching scene reminds us of the love and bond that holds us together in the church. We are not merely a Rotary Club or some other social or business group. We are the kingdom of God, children of the very Creator who has called us out of this world to live and love and show compassion as we serve the Lord awaiting our eternal hope to come to fruition. Christianity certainly has its individual element as we each are accountable to God for our decisions and actions, but we are remiss if we fail to see the group aspect of our faith. We are part of a larger body that we minister to, love and care for. It was this body that moved Paul, more than once, to tears. Paul gave of himself -- willingly, financially, physically, emotionally -- so the church would grow and better see God. We should hearken Paul's encouragement that, "if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:1-5).

3. The people urged Paul "not to go up to Jerusalem."

Paul was not the first one in this position! In Matthew 16:21, we read of Jesus telling his apostles that he "must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things ... and be killed." Peter rose up in protest and rebuked Jesus saying it should never happen. This was when Jesus told Peter, "Get behind me Satan! ... For you are not setting your mind on the

things of God, but on the things of man.” Paul did not flinch; he did not hesitate. Paul knew whom he served and Paul was ready to serve with his life. Paul had no illusions the road was easy; but that made no difference. Paul never sought the easy road. Paul wanted to follow Jesus, plain and simple. Whether the road led up or down, Paul was set like steel to follow where God led. Anything beyond knowing and following Jesus was “rubbish” or garbage to Paul (Phil. 3:8). Toward that end, Paul was glad to “share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil. 3:10). May we so love Jesus!