

## Difficult Farewells- Acts 20:1-38

### Introduction:

If you have ever had to say goodbye to a church family, or a community you had grown to love, you will know what the Apostle Paul must have been feeling as he completed his third Missionary journey. He had started a collection for the Christians of Jerusalem and he wanted to get back as soon as possible to share the much needed funds with the believers. Throughout this chapter we see Paul encountering groups of Christians and ministering to them. William Barclay summarizes this section with these words:

“Through all this scene runs the dominant feeling of an affection as deep as the heart itself. That feeling should be in every church; for when love dies in any church the work of Christ cannot do other than wither.”<sup>1</sup>

Look for ways in this passage that Paul’s love was shown for the churches of Macedonia, Greece, and Asia. How can we show that kind of love in our church in our context?

### Trip Through Macedonia and Greece – Acts 20:1-6

1. When it was safe – after the uproar ceased – Paul called together the disciples and said farewell. Where did Paul head from Ephesus? (v.1) What was his mission there (v.2)? What cities might he visit in that area? (cf. Acts 16:12, 17:1, 17:10)
2. What was Paul’s next stop on his journey (v.2)? What cities might he visit there? (Acts 17:15, 18:1) How long did Paul stay in this area? (It has been suggested Paul may have written the Epistle to the Romans at this time.) Why might he stay so long in this area?
3. Why did Paul not travel by ship to Syria (ie. Antioch)? Why was that wise?
4. In verse 4 we have a list of Paul’s traveling companions. How many are there? Might that be significant? Four of these members we will not hear of

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles: DSB (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) p. 152.

again. Though these disciples disappear from history, why might we have this list anyway?

5. The other disciples sail ahead and wait for Paul in Troas. We are given a time period when Paul leaves Philippi to join them in Troas. When was it? Why might this be a disappointment for Paul?
6. Notice in verse 5 that the narrative moves from third person (he, they) to second person (we). Who is likely traveling with Paul now?

### **The Lucky One – Acts 20:7-16**

7. When was it that Paul met with the Christians of Troas according to verse 7? What was the purpose of the gathering? What does this tell us about the significance of “Sunday”?
8. As many of the early believers were slaves and servants, meetings would be held at night after sunset when their responsibilities were completed. This would mean some time after six o’clock. How long did Paul share with the believers, knowing he left them in the morning (v. 7)? Seeing it was after sunset, what was necessary to light the room (v. 8)? Why might Luke record this seemingly obvious and unimportant detail?
9. In verse 9 we are introduced to a man named Eutychus, which means “lucky” or “fortunate”. Where is he sitting? And as the preacher (ie. Paul) speaks on and on and on what happens to Eutychus? What tells us this was no minor fall?
10. What is Paul’s message to the gathering (v. 10)? Paul continues his conversation with the gathered people and leaves at daybreak. What good news do we learn about Eutychus in verse 12? What is missing in this story that we might have anticipated?
11. In verse 13, we see the traveling companions of Paul board a ship and sail around the tip of the Asian Roman Province to a city named Assos.

Meanwhile Paul travels alone inland, traveling the 32 km on foot. What made this trip both possible and safe?

12. Paul is picked up and they sail to Mitylene, then to Chios, then Samos and Miletus. As was typical of sea travel in those days the ships would go about a days journey, seek a port, and do another days journey, always seeking safe shelter for the night. The one place Paul does not stop at is Ephesus. Why? (v. 16) Why might Paul want to be in Jerusalem at this time?

### **Paul Speaks to the Ephesian Elders – Acts 20:17-35**

13. Paul sends to the Ephesian church a message for their elders to join him in Miletus. He wants to say a proper farewell. Why did he not do that when he left Ephesus (cf. 20:1)?
14. In verse 18-21 Paul describes what his ministry was like. Describe some of the characteristics of his ministry in these verses.
15. In verses 22-23 Paul tells us what lies ahead for him. What does he anticipate as he follows the Spirit's leading?
16. What is Paul's response knowing that danger lies ahead (v. 24)?
17. Paul now informs them of sad news: they would never see him again. Then in verse 26-27 Paul says he is "innocent of the blood of all of you." What does he mean by this? (cf. Ezekiel 33:4, Acts 18:6)
18. What three things do we learn about the church in verse 28?
19. What warning does Paul give in verse 29-31?
20. In verse 32 Paul blesses the Ephesian elders. What does he entrust them to?

21. In verses 33-35 we get a glimpse of Paul's philosophy of "work" (paid labour). Describe Paul's view of work. What was the purpose of work according to Paul?
22. Where do we find Jesus saying what Paul quotes in verse 35?

### **A Tearful Goodbye – Acts 20:36-38**

23. Paul prays for the elders of Ephesus before he leaves. What posture does he assume (v. 36)? Is this the only way to approach God in prayer?
24. Verse 37 reveals the relationship of the Ephesians to Paul. Describe that relationship and how you arrive at that conclusion.
25. What troubled the Ephesian elders the most about what Paul said (v. 38)?

### **Conclusion:**

Looking back at the story of Eutychus, there may be a parable here as well as a nearly tragic story with a touch of humour. Every pastor smiles at the thought of someone falling asleep in the middle of a sermon of Paul. We have all had a few Eutychus' in our services! But Richard Thompson in his commentary on Acts reminds us that those falling asleep also characterized a danger in the spiritual journey. Though the lights shine from others we can drift off from our relationship with Jesus, and literally fall away. But the good news is we serve a God of grace. Though Eutychus fell and appeared to be dead (physically and spiritually), God raised him up. Richard Thompson notes that we are told the young boy goes home AFTER the all night session with Paul. That means he is taken back into the church. And for this the church is encouraged.<sup>2</sup> They did not lose Eutychus. This chapter speaks much of God's grace to rescue people from death and sin through the ministry of Paul. Eutychus illustrates that grace. Thank the Lord for His mercy.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard P. Thompson, Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition (Beacon Hill Press, 2015) pp. 335-336.