

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty-Five
Acts 20:1-29

Day One

20:1 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.

v. 1 – Now that the public disturbance was over, Paul decided that the time was right to depart. Luke wrote that he left only after encouraging the disciples. **How often has that been your goal: to encourage the disciples? All too often I have sought my own encouragement instead of encouraging others. I have preferred my own comfort over comforting others. In other words, I've been selfish. What can you do today to encourage someone in their walk with the Lord? These Bible studies are one way that I believe I can encourage others instead of expecting them to encourage or edify me. What can you do today?**

v. 2 – Paul continued on his encouragement tour. Paul was always on the move, always fulfilling his purpose in the will of God. **I hear many today referring to apostolic ministry, but who among us wants to go through what Paul went through? What price are you willing to pay to fulfill your purpose?**

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:22-29).

v. 3 – The pattern was so consistent and predictable: Paul traveled, settled in one place, preached at the synagogue, identified some disciples, and continued to teach and train. The opposition arose, usually from Jews, they endangered Paul and he moved on. After a while, Paul could have asked the Lord what he was doing wrong. Instead, Paul saw this

as the pattern of his ministry and endured it with patience and endurance. What is the pattern of your life and service to God? Mine is a transition every five years since I have known the Lord. I am coming up on another five-year milestone, so I am watching anxiously to see what the Lord would have me do.

v. 4 – Paul wasn't traveling alone; he seldom did. Instead he had seven men with him from diverse places. It is easier to travel alone, but more dangerous, both spiritually and physically. Paul almost always traveled with a team. I have asked this before but I will ask you again: Who is on your team? On whose team are you serving?

Day Two

5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days. 7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.

v. 5 – Oops. There were eight men with Paul, not seven. Luke here identified himself as one of the company with Paul. While the others went to Troas, Paul and Luke (and maybe Timothy?) went back through Macedonia. The rest of the team waited patiently for Paul to rejoin them. I wonder why Paul went out of his way to go back to Macedonia? Perhaps it was to see his favorite church in Philippi. I think it's safe to assume that Paul went there to encourage someone, for that seemed to be the emphasis of his ministry at that time.

v. 6 – Luke was certainly a man for details. When he was with Paul, we have a day-by-day account of their travels. As mentioned earlier, Luke was a doctor and scientist. One would expect him to be precise and God used his penchant for precision. **Who are you? What does God want to do with and through you, not as you think you should be, but as you are? What would you like to change about yourself that God isn't interested in changing?**

v. 7 – Paul was certainly on a mission, for he was moving around, not staying in any place for very long. The believers came together on what we know as Sunday, since that was the day the believers celebrated the resurrection of Jesus. Since Paul was leaving the next day, he wanted to maximize his time there. The meeting, therefore, went on for quite a while. It seems that it wasn't just Paul speaking, but also answering questions as well. I am making an effort to make time for questions and answers wherever I am and whatever I am teaching. I am concerned that I connect with the people and understand their concerns and make sure that my "brilliant" teaching is understood. I say that tongue-in-cheek because all too often I have assumed that I have gotten my point across only to find out I was "clear as mud." **Are you accessible for people to ask you questions? Are you open to correction even as a teacher?**

v. 8 – I wonder why Luke mentioned the lamps? Perhaps they made the room warmer, which made it harder for those present to stay awake during the long meeting. Pastors, leaders and teachers need to remember that we are working with people who have jobs and who aren't as motivated by some of the spiritual things that motivate us. Tomorrow we will see more of what I mean.

Day Three

9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, 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.

v. 9 – Do you know how to remember the name of the man who fell out of the window while Paul was preaching? “You’d have cussed, too” if you had fallen out of the window! His name was Eutychus. All right, enough with the bad jokes. As I mentioned yesterday, this young man was at the meeting, but he was tired and fell asleep. A number of years ago, I stopped using notes when I preached. Rather I memorized my messages, which enabled me to preach shorter sermons, which helped people listen. When I preach or teach, I try to keep my focus on two things: the Lord and the people. It’s not about me when I talk; it’s about Him and getting His message across to His people.

We know that Paul wasn't a great speaker by his own admission:

I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way (2 Corinthians 11:5).

Yet we know that Jesus was a great speaker because of the insight that He shared with the people:

The large crowd listened to him with delight (Mark 12:37).

Are you using what you have to do God's work? Are you working to perfect what God has given you so that you can be even more effective? If people are “falling asleep on you,” is it a problem with them or with you and your style? What price are you willing to pay to get better at what you do? What is your plan to do so?

v. 10 – Paul wasn't offended when the young man fell asleep because Paul had no ministry ego. There are some preachers I know who probably would have left the young man on the street, saying he got what he deserved. But Paul ran down and threw himself on the young man, bringing him back to life! Are you willing as a Christian leader to throw yourself into the problems and weaknesses of those whom you serve? Are you willing to acknowledge that your ministry style and message may not be to everyone's

liking? Can you still love those people and help them as they struggle with their own humanity?

v. 11 – I love this verse. A man just fell to his death trying to listen to Paul as he went on and on. Paul revives him and then goes back to resume the meeting. What’s more, Paul spoke until sunrise. Just another day at the office, I suppose! One side of me says, “Paul, give the people a break and go home!” But the other side of me says, “Why shouldn’t we engage in the work and knowledge of God even if it means losing sleep?” Are you willing to lose sleep for the cause of Christ? Are you willing to listen to a speaker who knows Jesus but who isn’t the most dynamic speaker?

v. 12 – I’m sure the people went home greatly comforted. They could finish the meeting with Paul because they didn’t have to go home and prepare a funeral! We are so frail, so weak. Only one minute, one small step, one breath separates us from being here and being on the other side of this existence. **Are you making the most of every day? It may be your last on earth.**

"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:6-8).

O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow (Psalm 144:3-4).

Day Four

13 We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. 15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

v. 13 – Experts say that this itinerary is accurate and one that the mariners in Paul’s day would have followed. Did we expect anything less from the Bible? The Bible isn’t a history or science book, but it is accurate, increasingly so as additional excavations and discoveries are made. I wonder why Paul walked while the others sailed? Perhaps Paul wanted to be available for ministry on his journey, ministry that would not have been available had he sailed. It would have been less physical exertion had he sailed, but the great apostle never chose the easy way. **Can the same be said for you?**

vs. 14-16 – Why was Paul so anxious to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost? Could it be that there would be many Jews from all over the world, and these Jews could provide more “leads” that Paul could use on his travels? Remember, he began a visit to any city with a

trip to the synagogue. Or was Paul still hoping for another outpouring on the Jews as had happened at Pentecost as described in Acts 2? Or was Paul homesick, wanting to see Jerusalem and the capital of his Jewish roots and heritage? Or did Paul know that he had to be in Jerusalem for the next chapter of his remarkable ministry to unfold? Even Jesus knew that His destiny was to unfold in that holy city:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-52).

We aren't exactly sure why, but he felt compelled to go and didn't want any distractions. Thus, he wanted to bypass Ephesus, scene of the recent public demonstration on behalf of Diana and against Paul. Paul seemed certain of God's will as he moved about the Roman Empire. **Are you certain of God's will for you? What can you do to obtain such certainty? After all, if God wants you to do His will (and of course He does), then He must reveal to you what His will is. God is a great communicator. We must learn to be great listeners.**

Day Five

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. 20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

v. 17 – Paul bypassed Ephesus due to the urgency of his Jerusalem visit. But he could not resist the opportunity to speak to the elders from that church. It is still a surprise to me that there were elders in the churches that Paul planted after such a short time. One reader surmised that these elders could have been drawn from the Jewish converts, who would have had more spiritual “history,” having been raised Jews. This is certainly plausible. But at the same time, I'm sure Paul had to “set things in order” in his churches without worrying about whether he had the ideal people.

I think at times we all allow perfectionism to keep us from doing what we need to do. Because we can't do the best thing, we do no thing. I often use an analogy from sports where clubs have to field a team whether it has the best players or not. They must play the game with what and who they have. I think we could learn something from them. Even though Paul didn't have much time, he still established elders and moved on. **Is this true in your life? Are you not doing something because it isn't as good as you would like it to be? But shouldn't you just go ahead because it's the best that you can produce now? You may not write the best novel on the market, but should that stop you from writing at all?**

v. 18 – Paul was accessible to the people among whom he ministered. He served as their role model and teacher. I fear that too many leaders today are trained to be aloof and inaccessible to the people they pastor and serve. Paul could speak openly about himself and his leadership because he had practiced what he preached. He had modeled the ideal for them. Let's look at what this style entailed.

v. 19 – First, Paul must have **cried** a lot. That means he was vulnerable, both to suffer and let the people see him suffer. **What makes your cry as a leader? Do others see your emotions? Do you treat your emotions as an important part of who you are or do you hide them?**

Second, Paul was also **humble**. Humility is a decision. I heard someone say once that either you humble yourself or else God will humble you. When God humbles you, He often humiliates you. **Since humility is a decision, what can you do to humble yourself today?**

Third, Paul was **tested** by the many plots of the Jews against him. Notice Luke wrote "plots" and not "plot." The Jews were relentless in their hateful attempts to destroy Paul and his work. Paul had to repeatedly trust in the Lord to deliver him from all trouble and eventually had to move on to other ministry fields to save his life. **When tested, do you submit to God, trusting Him for His saving grace? Or do you resort to plotting and planning in an effort to save yourself?**

As I've said before, there are many who are ambitious for apostolic ministry. Are they as ambitious for the price of such ministry or for the perceived glory therein?

v. 20 – Fourth, Paul was a great teacher and **worked hard** to equip the believers for their Christian walk. He did this both publicly and from house to house. Paul didn't only work with large crowds or from the pulpit, he went from house to house, small meeting to small meeting and did all he could to prepare the believers for success in the Lord. **What price are you willing to pay to carry out your purpose? Can you look past the big expressions to work with individuals and small groups?**

v. 21 – Fifth, Paul was **consistent** with a message that he delivered without bias to both Jews and Greeks. Billy Graham comes to mind here, for he too had a consistent message that the Lord had given him. I know other church leaders who will preach whatever the latest message is because they depend on speaking for their livelihood. Therefore, they must adapt their message to the audience to make sure they have a chance of a return visit. **What is your life message? And are you consistent in its delivery and in living it out?**

Day Six

22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me,

if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

v. 22 – For the first time, Luke mentioned why Paul was so urgently heading to Jerusalem: The Spirit was compelling him to go. Yet Paul trusted and obeyed the Lord because he didn't know the reason he had to be there. This tells us something about Paul's level of commitment and maturity: he obeyed without having reasons to obey. In other words, he obeyed for obedience sake. Help me, Lord, to get to that level. All too often I want to obey when it makes sense or when I perceive it is in my best interest to do so. Obedience isn't about my best interests, although obedience is ultimately in my best interest. But obedience is first and foremost about God and His best interests.

v. 23 – Now we see that Paul did some specific information about his visit to Jerusalem. He didn't know why he was going, but he knew that prison and hardships were waiting there for him. Isn't that interesting? He knew that God was leading him to something unpleasant and even personally harmful, yet he was pressing to get there. That was the trust level that Paul had in His Lord and God.

Not everything God asks you to do is going to end in victory or success as we would define it. Paul understood that Paul could ask him or any of His servants to give their lives in His service or in the service of others. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you (Philippians 2:17-18).

A drink offering was a liquid that poured out before the Lord. It wasn't consumed by anyone; it was simply poured out once, never to be seen or thought of again. Paul said that he was willing to be like a drink offering, poured out on someone else's service. *Lord, help me to serve You in times where I am noticed and at times when I serve in obscurity. Help me to have the same attitude that was in Jesus and Paul. What I do, Lord, I do for You and You alone, even when I am serving Your people. **Could you serve God so fervently if you knew you were headed to prison and trials for His sake? Is there anything God has asked you to do upon which you have the slightest hesitation? I urge you to obey today and take steps to fulfill His purpose for your life.***

v. 24 – Paul considered his life worth nothing, but I consider mine to be worth everything; that is why I am so protective of it. People ask me all the time, "Aren't you afraid to travel to Africa so often?" I respond, "I gave my life to Jesus on May 18, 1973. I didn't loan it to Him to take it back when I thought He wasn't using it properly or in a way of which I approve." Paul's goal was to finish the task that God had given him, and that was his purpose of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. He was willing to give everything he had to achieve that end, with God's help. What price are you willing to pay to fulfill your purpose? What is your purpose or life task? Do you know?

Day Seven

25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

v. 25 – Paul was certainly emphatic that this was his last meeting with the Ephesian elders. Yet it appears that he did manage to revisit the area after his Roman imprisonment and release. How could Paul be so certain, but perhaps mistaken? There are a few options: 1) He never did return and historians are mistaken; 2) He meant that he would never see those particular elders again; 3) Paul was sensing impending change and even doom, but misinterpreted the severity or eventual outcome.

Many spiritual people don't see how number three could even be possible. But I think I understand it. We are people of faith, but not people of perfection. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

I am never surprised when I don't see something fully, for I am looking through a glass, but the glass is smoked. That prevents me from seeing clearly. **Do you agree with this? How does this make you feel if what you are seeing or sensing may not be totally accurate, or the complete picture? Does that make you less spiritual than you should be? Does it call into question your faith or your ability to obey God?**

vs. 26&27 – That is quite a statement for any leader to make. I wonder why Paul felt the need to declare this? Was he accused of some mismanagement? Or was he simply declaring even to heavenly beings that he was a man of integrity? Or perhaps was he referring to the passage in Ezekiel:

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword

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comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood” (Ezekiel 33:1-6).

Paul had been faithful to fulfill his purpose and he did that with no regard to his personal safety. How many of us can make that statement?

vs. 28&29 – Paul urged the leaders to watch over the flock and themselves, lest they be good pastors but fall short themselves of the prize in Christ. This is such good advice, for Christian leaders can give themselves away in the service of God’s people. **Are you watching out for yourself in the things of God as well as other people?**

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:26-10:1).

The Church is always subject to wolves who prey on sheep. Leaders must be aware of the nature of spiritual work and must do what they can to protect the flock. Yet the Church doesn’t belong to any leader; the Church belongs to Jesus because He purchased it with His blood. Therefore no leader can refer to the Church as “his” or “hers.” It belongs to God and the warfare directed at the Church is really warfare against God.

Our enemy doesn’t fight fairly. He is ruthless and desires to dishonor God and destroy His people. He only respects and understands one thing: a power greater than His own, which is God’s power. You cannot wish evil away or be passive when evil attacks. You must be aggressive, but not in your own strength. Rather you must be strong in the power of God, especially as a leader. Whether you realize it or not, the Church is under attack. So if you are part of the Church, then you are under attack as well. So I urge you to take Paul’s warning seriously and arm yourself for battle:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:11-18).