

Farewell to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

I. Background and Introduction

- a. Paul is now on his third missionary journey. He began by going the inland route through Asia Minor (modern Turkey), going from Syria through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia (in the inland center of Turkey), traveling westward and ending up at Ephesus, on the western coast.
- b. When we left off at the end of the previous lesson, at the end of **Acts 19**, the spread of the Christian faith in Ephesus and throughout the province of Asia had progressed to such an extent that it was impacting the silversmiths who were making idols for Diana (Artemis).
 - i. This had prompted a riot in Ephesus against the Christians.
- c. The current lesson, on **Acts 20**, covers three things from the later part of Paul's third missionary journey:
 - i. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul sails back to Macedonia, then travels south to Achaia, and after spending three months there, he returns to Macedonia.
 - ii. He then sails from Philippi in Macedonia to Troas in Asia, and stays there seven days. While there, the night before he plans to depart, Paul preaches until midnight, at which time a young man, Eutychus, falls out of a third-floor window.
 - iii. After departing Troas, Paul sails past Ephesus to Mitylene. He asks the Ephesian elders to join him there, and he gives a famous 'farewell address' to them.

II. Paul Travels to Macedonia and Greece (Achaia)

- a. Read **Acts 20:1-6**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Paul sails from Ephesus back to Macedonia.
 - ii. From Macedonia he proceeds south to Greece (Achaia, where Athens and Corinth are). As he travels through the regions, he encourages the Christians there "with many words". He stays in Greece for three months.

- iii. He wants to sail from there back to Syria. However, due to Jews there plotting against him, he changes plans and returns north to Macedonia.
 - iv. Paul sails from Philippi and rejoins his traveling companions in Troas, in the province of Asia.
- c. Early Christian writer Irenaeus commented on one word in this statement that most of us probably overlooked.
- i. “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.” (**Acts 20:6**, NKJV)
 - ii. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD) was bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul (modern-day France). In his youth he learned at the feet of Polycarp, who in turn was a personal disciple of the apostle John. Writing c. 180 AD in *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus said regarding Luke, the author of **Acts** and the **Gospel According to Luke**:
 - 1. “But that this Luke was inseparable from Paul, and his fellow-laborer in the gospel, he himself clearly evinces, not as a matter of boasting, but as bound to do so by the truth itself. For he says that when Barnabas, and John who was called Mark, had parted company from Paul, and sailed to Cyprus, ‘we came to Troas;’ and when Paul had beheld in a dream a man of Macedonia, saying, ‘Come into Macedonia, Paul, and help us,’ ‘immediately,’ he says, ‘we endeavored to go into Macedonia, understanding that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel unto them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we directed our ship’s course towards Samothracia.’ And then he carefully indicates all the rest of their journey as far as Philippi, and how they delivered their first address: ‘for, sitting down,’ he says, ‘we spoke to the women who had assembled;’ (**Acts 16:13**) and certain believed, even a great many.
 - 2. “And again does he say, ‘But we sailed from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to Troas, where we abode seven days.’ (**Acts 20:6**)
 - 3. “And all the remaining [details] of his course with Paul he recounts, indicating with all diligence both places, and cities, and number of days, until they went up to Jerusalem; and what befell Paul there, (**Acts 21**) how he was sent to Rome in bonds; the name of the centurion who took him in charge (**Acts 27**); and the signs of the ships, and how they made shipwreck; (**Acts 28:11**) and the island upon which they escaped, and how

they received kindness there, Paul healing the chief man of that island; and how they sailed from thence to Puteoli, and from that arrived at Rome; and for what period they sojourned at Rome.

4. “As Luke was present at all these occurrences, he carefully noted them down in writing, so that he cannot be convicted of falsehood or boastfulness, because all these [particulars] proved both that he was senior to all those who now teach otherwise, and that he was not ignorant of the truth. That he was not merely a follower, but also a fellow-laborer of the apostles, but especially of Paul, Paul has himself declared also in the Epistles, saying: ‘Demas has forsaken me, ... and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. *Only Luke is with me.*’ (**2 Timothy 4:10-11**)
5. “From this he shows that he was always attached to and inseparable from him. And again, he says, in the **Epistle to the Colossians**: ‘*Luke, the beloved physician, greets you.*’ (**Colossians 4:14**)
 - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 14; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 437–438)
- iii. As Irenaeus points out, in **Acts 20** and elsewhere we see evidence that Luke was an eyewitness account of many of the events recorded in Acts, as a travelling companion of Paul.

III. Eutychus Raised

- a. Read **Acts 20:7-12**
- b. “On the first day of the week....”
 - i. “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.” (**Acts 20:7**, NKJV)
 1. This is the only passage in the New Testament where it speaks of Christians gathering together on the first day of the week, a practice that we Christians still observe.
 - ii. Other early references to Christians gathering on the first day of the week include:
 1. In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul addresses problems that are happening “when you come together as a church... to eat the Lord’s supper”. However, there is no mention in that letter of

when (which day of the week) or with what frequency they did that.

2. “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” (**1 Corinthians 16:2**, NKJV)
3. *The Didache* is an early manual of practice for Christian churches. It may be the earliest Christian writing we have outside of the New Testament (c. 80-140 AD). In chapter 14 of that work, it says:
 - a. “On the Lord’s Day, gather together and break bread and give thanks after you have confessed your failings, so that your sacrifice may be pure.”
4. The term “Lord’s Day” also is found in **Revelation 1:10**. The term was used by early Christians to refer to the day of the week when the Lord rose from the dead (first day of the week: Sunday).
 - a. For more on this, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on ‘Lord’s Day’.
5. From Justin Martyr’s *First Apology*, written to the Roman authorities c. 160 AD:
 - a. “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.
 - b. “Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.
 - c. “And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause,

are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

- d. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn [= *Saturday*]; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun [= *Sunday*], having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.”

- i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 67; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 186)

6. These are the reasons why Christians have gathered together from ancient times, on the first day of the week, to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, and to share the Lord’s Supper together on that day every week.

- c. Regarding the unusual story of Eutychus:

- i. Storyline:

1. They are in Troas, in the province of Asia.
 2. Paul is in Troas for seven days.
 3. On the first day of the week the disciples gather to break bread (presumably referring to the Lord’s Supper). Since Paul is leaving the next morning, he preaches late into the night.
 4. The people are gathered in an upper (third story) room, which is lit by many (oil) lamps.
 5. A young man, Eutychus (who will be known through the ages for this unfortunate incident), is sitting in a windowsill and is drowsy. He falls asleep, then falls from the third-story window to the ground and is considered dead.
 6. Paul falls on him and raises him to life. The young man is brought in, and the people are encouraged.

7. Paul continues preaching and “talked a long while, *even till daybreak....*”
 - a. This lengthy preaching right before his departure shows how passionate Paul was about preaching the Word of the Lord, and how much he was concerned about the Christians!
- ii. **Question:** What on earth are we supposed to learn from this story?
 1. Did the young man do anything wrong?
 - a. It does not say here, unlike when the disciples fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane and got rebuked by Jesus. (**Mark 14:32-42**)
 2. Is this a warning against falling asleep in church?
 3. Is this a justification for extremely long sermons?
 4. Did Paul raise Eutychus from the dead, or did it just seem like he was dead (but he was just unconscious)?
 - a. Seems unclear to me.
 5. To be honest, I am not sure what we are supposed to learn from this incident. However, it is part of the story and really happened, as recorded by Luke!

IV. Farewell Address to the Ephesian Elders

- a. Read **Acts 20:13-37**.
 - i. The setting:
 1. Paul does not want to be delayed from his desire to be back in Jerusalem for Pentecost.
 2. However, he wants to speak to the leaders of the church of Ephesus.
 3. Therefore, he sails past Ephesus, but asks for that church’s elders to come and meet him in Miletus. There he gives them a ‘farewell address’, telling them this is the last time they will ever see him.
 - b. Why I see this brief message as extremely important.
 - i. This is a true ‘farewell address’.

1. Paul has devoted three years of his life to the church in Ephesus.
 2. Paul knows they will never see his face again.
- ii. Other famous 'farewell addresses; in the Bible include:
1. Moses, in **Deuteronomy 30-32**.
 - a. Read **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**.
 - b. Read **Deuteronomy 31:1-8**.
 - c. Moses' farewell address: two roads, one to life, one to death; and charges Joshua to lead the people.
 2. Joshua, in **Joshua 23-24**.
 - a. Read **Joshua 23:6-16**.
 - b. Read **Joshua 24:14-15**.
 - c. Joshua's farewell address to the people warns them what will happen if they do not follow God. ("As for me and my household, we will follow the Lord.")
 3. Jesus to the seven churches of Asia, in **Revelation 2-3**.
 - a. Jesus gives comforting words and warnings in His "farewell addresses" to the seven churches.
- iii. From U.S. history, famous 'farewell addresses' include:
1. George Washington, who upon stepping down from the presidency, warned future generations to "avoid entangling alliances and European wars".
 2. President Dwight Eisenhower (who had been a general), who warned about the dangers of the "military-industrial complex".
- iv. Typical features of classic 'farewell addresses' include:
1. They are issued by a respected leader, a visionary who is deeply concerned about the fate of those who will continue long after he is gone.
 2. These addresses are often condensed and powerful.

3. It contains dire *warnings* about extreme challenges that the people will face in the future, and the ruin that will happen if they go down the wrong path.
 4. It calls the people to make important decisions, and to stick with them.
 5. If the speaker has great wisdom, these speeches are worth studying carefully and repeatedly.
 6. In light of these characteristics of classic farewell addresses, let us now consider Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders.
- c. Paul starts his address to the Ephesian elders by reminding them of his life, which they had seen first-hand.
- i. He said, "You know... in what manner I lived among you." (**Acts 20:18**)
 - ii. Paul also said they saw how he had been serving the Lord "with all humility, with many tears and trials." (**Acts 20:19**)
 - iii. Paul then says it is only going to get worse for him in the future, with *even more* chains and tribulations.
 - iv. Paul's ministry was, first and foremost, *the example of his own life*. He saw the Christian faith as a way of life that he would show other people.
 1. His teaching style was not simply to give a lesson on theology!
- d. Testifying to all (Jews and Gentiles) "*repentance* and faith".
- i. Notice that "*repentance*" is *mentioned first* here, even before "faith".
 - ii. Repentance also is *mentioned first* among the six elementary teachings of the faith, in **Hebrews 6:1-3**.
 - iii. At the outset of their public ministries, John the Baptist and Jesus preached: "*Repent* for the kingdom is at hand." (**Matthew 3:1-2, Matthew 4:17**)
 - iv. **Challenge:** We also should lead by preaching repentance at or near the beginning of presenting the gospel message to others!
 1. It is sin that enslaves and blinds people spiritually.
 2. If someone turns away from their sins, they will more readily be able to respond to the gospel.

3. Therefore, let us not delay in talking about sin when we share the gospel with unbelievers!
4. When preachers never preach repentance, one might wonder if they may be harboring unconfessed sin *in their own lives*!
 - a. However, some preachers are hypocritical, and can preach repentance even while not be repenting of sin *in their own lives*.
 - b. Godly preachers should be calling others to repent, and be constantly repenting themselves!
5. Read **Luke 13:1-5**.
 - a. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”
 - b. Sin is like a disease or a blindness. Let’s help people get sin out of their lives so they can see the gospel clearly!
- e. Paul said he was willing to endure the suffering that would follow, that he could just “finish my race”.
 - i. “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.” (**Acts 20:24**, NKJV)
 - ii. Paul saw his life as a race that he was running, which he had to finish strong.

1. Questions:

- a. In what sense is the Christian life similar to a race that a person runs?
 - b. Do you consider your spiritual life as a race you are running? Should you?
 - c. Was this view of the Christian life as a race to be run only applicable to the ‘Olympic champion athlete’ type Christians, such as the apostle Paul? Or should it apply to me, as well?
2. Many find this “run the race” language discouraging. Either they were never athletic, never competitive, or did poorly in those types of endeavors.

- a. Personal example: my own experiences running races.
 - i. In high school, I ran cross country and indoor track for a couple of seasons. Unfortunately, I was so slow that my parents gave me a turtle tiepin for my birthday!
 - ii. In college, I decided to join the crew (rowing) team. This is a brutal endurance sport, an anaerobic exercise where you soon deplete the oxygen in your muscles, resulting in excruciating pain.
 1. To train for rowing, which requires leg strength, we would run up and down the football stadium stairs in timed trials once each week!
 - iii. Many years later, working as an engineer, I would jog outside during lunchtime at my office. A co-worker invited the runners in the office to a local 5k road race. One of my co-workers said prior to that race that her goal in the race was to beat me!
 1. My wife's well-meaning advice prior to the start of the race: "If it hurts, stop running!"
 2. My wife was not an athletic type of person, so she did not understand that overcoming pain was part of running a 5k. So, I had to block her 'advice' out of my mind during the race!
- b. Similarities between one's life as a Christian and an endurance race include the following:
 - i. It has a beginning and an end.
 - i. It can become so hard in the middle that you are tempted to quit. Your flesh screams, "Stop! Why are you doing this to me?" And your will has to say, "Be quiet! I am in charge here, not you!".
 1. In the middle of the race, if I thought about the entire rest of the race, it would be overwhelming.

2. So you needed to focus on some short-term milestones, which in rowing might be only the next 10 strokes.
 3. This reminds me of what Jesus said, “Do not worry about tomorrow....” (**Matthew 6:34**) It is enough to focus on today, the day immediately before us!
- ii. It requires strict training.
 1. It impacts what you eat, alcohol use, drug use, and proper rest
 2. The necessary training can be extremely challenging, involving self-denial and early morning workouts. It requires great discipline!
 - iii. Encouragement along the way can help you to keep going when you feel like quitting.
 3. Boston Marathon – crowds, water, other runners/friends urging you on.
 - ii. You will be disqualified if you do not compete according to the rules.
 1. As someone who lives in Boston, I think of the infamous account of Rosy Ruiz running the Boston Marathon in 1980. She was awarded the medal for being the first female finisher, but it was taken from her days later when they discovered that she had cheated and taken a trolley ride for part of the marathon route!
 - iii. There is a crown (or another prize) awarded to those who are victorious.
3. Many passages of Scripture (not just this one in **Acts 20**) speak of the Christian race as being like a race.
 - a. Read **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**.
 - i. Paul had to bring his body into subjection, in order to compete in the race.

- ii. He speaks of an 'eternal crown' which he was running for.
- b. Read **Hebrews 12:1-6**.
- i. After the 'hall of heroes of the faith' of **Hebrews 11**, we have what I would consider to be the most significant passage in the New Testament that describes the Christian life as similar to a race that is run.
 - ii. We have a "cloud of witnesses", those who ran before us, who are now watching us (perhaps figuratively).
 - iii. The call is for all Christians to run "the race set before us".
 - 1. It does not matter whether your race is in the Olympics or in the 'Special Olympics'. You have a race set before you.
 - 2. You will need *perseverance and endurance* to run your race.
 - 3. It is one that you will be able to run, with God's help. The discussion about running our spiritual race that begins in **1 Corinthians 9** concludes with the following statement:
 - a. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (**1 Corinthians 10:13**, NKJV)
 - b. The point Paul is making is that the race before us will not be impossible for us to run. You can do it! We will not be tempted more than we can bear. Therefore, none of us should feel defeated nor can we make any excuses!

- c. Read **2 Timothy 4:7**.
 - i. Approaching the end of his life, Paul is able to say: “I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race*, I have kept the faith.” (**2 Timothy 4:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. This is the goal each of us should be striving for: to finish our race strong.
- d. Other New Testament passages which allude to the Christian life as being similar to running a race include:
 - i. **Philippians 2:16**,
 - ii. **Galatians 2:2** and **5:7**.
- f. The message that Paul had preached to the Ephesians was: *the kingdom of God*.
 - i. If you want to know what Paul preached, look at how he summarizes three years of his preaching ministry to the Ephesians.
 - 1. This is a more reasonable place to look for ‘Paul’s gospel’ than in his letter to the **Romans**, where Paul spends his first 11 chapters answering a specific question.
 - ii. “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone *preaching the kingdom of God*, will see my face no more.” (**Acts 20:25**, NKJV)
 - iii. The message of the kingdom of God.
 - 1. This is a real kingdom, with a real king (Jesus), subjects/citizens (the Christians), and real laws (the teachings of Jesus and the apostles).
 - 2. This is the message that Jesus said would be preached to the whole world.
 - a. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (**Matthew 24:14**, NKJV)
 - 3. For more on the message of the kingdom (as opposed to the popular modern ‘gospel’), see the audio message by David Bercot on *The Kingdom of God*, available through Scroll Publishing or online via the Scroll Publishing YouTube channel.

- g. We find insights into elder/bishop/shepherd roles in the church (all three terms are applied to the same group of men in **Acts 20**).
 - i. “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” (**Acts 20:17**, NKJV)
 - ii. “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.” (**Acts 20:28**, NKJV)
 - 1. The church belongs to Jesus. He purchased it, and He owns it.
 - 2. Elders/overseers are called to be shepherds over God’s flock.
 - a. Guard, protect, and make sure they are safe and in good pastures and water.
 - b. See **Ezekiel 34**.
 - c. See also **1 Peter 5:1-4**.
 - i. These men will be called to account by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus.
- h. Bad people will come into the church. This is a WARNING to the shepherds!
 - i. Read **Acts 20:29-31**.
 - ii. Note that this would happen to a church where Paul had spent *three years*, day and night, proclaiming the whole counsel of God.
 - iii. Some of the wicked people would come from among their own number!
 - iv. We also should expect this will happen, in *our own* churches.
 - 1. Jesus warned us in **Matthew 13**, in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, that Satan would sow some tares (sons of the evil one) among the good wheat.
 - 2. “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” (**Matthew 24:11-13**, NKJV)
 - 3. This is not an excuse for a lack of spiritual discipline! We need to follow what it says in **1 Corinthians** regarding warning and expelling the wicked.

4. It will be an ongoing battle against the forces of Satan invading and attacking the church. We have been warned about this by Jesus, Peter, Paul, James and Jude.
 - a. May we be vigilant and prepared, rather than shocked or surprised, when it happens!
- i. The importance of taking care of the poor and those in need.
 - i. Read **Acts 20:32-38**.
 - ii. Paul had worked while among them to show the importance of working to meet the needs of others.
 - iii. “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 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.’*” (**Acts 20:34–35**, NKJV)
 1. I am not aware of any quote like this from the four gospels, but Paul says it is an authentic saying from Jesus.
 - iv. The passage closes with a tearful, final farewell as the people escort Paul to the ship.