

## Acts 20: 1-12 Littlebourne 3 September 2023 - :Peter Hollander

*When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, <sup>3</sup> where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. <sup>6</sup> But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. <sup>9</sup> 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 storey and was picked up dead. <sup>10</sup> Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms round him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!' <sup>11</sup> Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. <sup>12</sup> The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

Last week there was a riot in Ephesus, Gaius and Aristarchus who were with Paul were seized and taken to the amphitheatre. By the grace of God, the rioters exhausted themselves with their chanting that "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours, and the city clerk convinced everyone to go home and take their grievances to court like reasonable men using legal channels. Paul had been advised to stay away for his own safety.

Paul had said earlier that he was going to Macedonia, Achaia and then Jerusalem. Now Luke tells us that this plan was put into action. He goes off apparently without disciples, because none are mentioned. Remember that Philippi and Thessalonica were in Macedonia, and Paul has been in Ephesus over two years. He now revisits the places we saw him visit on his second journey, encouraging the disciples made there. Then he will head south via Berea into Greece proper, or Achaia, which has Athens and Corinth as the main towns. Macedonia, despite Alexander the Great coming from it, was always considered by Greeks as a bit foreign, not properly Greek... nothing has changed as that remains the situation today. Paul stays in "Greece", probably Corinth, for three months. He's probably sent the Corinthians his first letter while he was in Ephesus, probably not long after he was there. He is believed to have visited Corinth some time in the two years he was in Ephesus. He then writes his second letter later on when he was either still in Ephesus or in Macedonia, but before he arrives for his third visit. He then stays three months, probably in Corinth where there seem have been problems. Christianity is new to both Jews and Greeks. Getting the mindset changed of people who have always believed that God needs to be appeased for wrong doing and that offering sacrifices will do the job, maybe, without certainty, has been a problem. Religion is about appeasing God for fear He will punish us or fail to bless us; love doesn't really come into it, though doing good is seen as a virtue. Christianity is about forgiveness freely given by Jesus when we confess our sins and it is about loving one another as God loves us. Christianity is about assurance of the love and forgiveness of Jesus as none of us can ever be righteous, while religion is about hoping that God might forgive us when he sees all the good things we have done, the ceremonies and sacrifices performed and weigh them against the bad things we've done. Greeks knew that the gods were fickle and needed to be given attention if attention was to be given back so that the afterlife would be tolerable... they were halfway there, because God needs our attention, but there is nothing we can give him that will bribe him to reward us with a pleasant afterlife/ All we

can give is our belief in his mercy and love, that Jesus has paid the price for our sins, and that we should follow the ways that have been set out in the Word of God so that our lives give him glory and honour.

*Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.*

Paul has had a lot of trouble from Jews opposing the Gospel, and he goes back via Thessalonica, Philippi over land, then sailing to Troas which is near the Dardenelles in present day Turkey, before setting sail for Israel to get to Jerusalem, his ultimate destination. This time Luke is with him as he mentioned “we” sailing from Philippi. When Luke joined Paul isn’t clear... perhaps he only joined Paul at Philippi. Mentioning the Festival of Unleavened Bread would indicate possibly that Paul, as a devout Jew still celebrated the Jewish festivals, or Luke is just setting the date in the year – this festival is Passover so in March or April, when the sailing season began again after winter stormy weather had died down.

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We get a list of men who travel with Paul: Aristarchus and Gaius we heard of earlier at the riot, Timothy who is also believed to come from Derbe. The others are new characters. Sopater and Secundus aren’t mentioned again. Tychicus and Trophimus are also mentioned in various of Paul’s letters. Philippi to Troas is about 150 miles by sea, but it took five days! Then they all stayed in Troas for a week. Paul had been to Troas before: it was where he had the dream that he was being called to Macedonia. Paul never wasted any opportunity to talk about Jesus.

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.*

The tradition of the church meeting together on a Sunday (the first day of the week) to share a meal will probably have already been established so this was probably a communion meal. Paul’s been in Troas a week already and this is the first reference to “breaking bread” on Paul’s missionary journeys. In Luke’s narrative there seems to be a hint of weariness: he’d probably heard it all before. The Greek says that Paul “lectured them as he was about to depart tomorrow” and that “the speech continued until midnight” which doesn’t quite match was the tone of the NIV translation. Paul always seemed to have a lot to say... but he is telling people about Jesus. If any of us had to summarise, for example, Mark’s Gospel that we spent over a year of Sundays looking at, in a few hours with cross references to the Old Testament it would take us most of the day with questions being answered and having to explain things to people who knew very little about Judaism or a loving God. Paul must also have been someone who could – for the most part – keep the attention of his listeners. However this time someone falls asleep while he is talking. Something all of us can manage listening to sermons in church after 20 minutes rather than half the night.

*<sup>9</sup> 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 storey and was picked up dead.*

This happens and it would seem no one was paying him much attention, otherwise they would have noticed him asleep. Health and Safety didn't exist to do a risk assessment so that sitting close to an open window would be avoided. The Greek says "Paul lecturing for a longer time" but the NIV says "Paul talked on and on" which gives a different flavour. Luke sets the tone subtly, but this episode is included because of the miraculous recovery after falling from the third floor. Falling this far would normally leave anyone hitting the ground as a bit of a mess. Broken bones, internal organs damaged. The first ones to find him pronounced him dead. No one these days would pick up someone who fell down this far – that is not current procedure! But they didn't know that this was bad practice and likely to make things worse.

*<sup>10</sup> Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms round him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!'*

Paul goes down, wraps himself around the young man and pronounces "do not be terrified, he's alive". How badly hurt he was we don't get to know. Paul's hungry after all that talking.

*<sup>11</sup> Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate.*

It seems so matter of fact: Paul returns upstairs, and has a bite to eat. This time it was probably just food without celebrating the Lord's Supper.

*After talking until daylight, he left. <sup>12</sup> The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

Then Paul resumes talking until daylight. Luke then remembers: oh yes the young man was taken home alive with what injuries, if any, we aren't told. It seems they went home at day break taking the young man with them, so no rush to get him home! The whole flavour of the narrative changes when Luke is relating first hand what is happening. We get extra detail and a matter of fact commentary on events.

### **If this story happened today, what would it look like?**

Today a travelling evangelist who is revisiting places where earlier he had missions is not so uncommon. There would be a team with the evangelist, as most don't travel alone, and sometimes the meetings would go on longer than expected. Accidents happen, and it is not unknown for people to fall thirty feet and not have much in the way of injuries. Falling while asleep or unconscious often results in fewer bones broken.

### **What is this story saying to us today?**

The passage highlights Paul's passion to get the Good News across to people, and he carries on all night if that is what Holy Spirit is leading him. Paul isn't doing stuff in his own strength after having seen Barnabas and others share the Gospel. He's doing it because Holy Spirit wants people to be saved, and doesn't want people being left behind or overlooked when Good News comes their way. The passage also tells us that some will not keep awake if we talk all day and night, and not to be too upset about that as God has everything in hand.

### **Could the story make a difference to my life, and if so, how?**

This is a tough question as always. When opportunity arises, do we make the time to share Good News with people even if we have other things to do? Even though Paul may have done some tent making we never see him badgered by customers wanting their order being fulfilled. So he didn't

have a nine to five job and his time as a self employed artisan was his own. We all have free time and while we all have commitments, their urgency and importance is often not so great as to stop us spending the time needed with someone in need – whether hearing the Gospel or some other practical need. So make time when Holy Spirit prompts us and always be open to that prompting.