

Lesson 18: The Third Missionary Journey Continues

Acts 20:1–21:16

Although Luke focused primarily on Paul’s journey and ministry in this latter part of Acts, we will see this week that Paul had many co-laborers whom he loved dearly and respected greatly. Part of Paul’s mission was to equip other leaders, encouraging them also to continue making disciples and ministering to the church of God. Though we might think he cast a large and looming shadow, he didn’t expect others to dwell there. Instead, he invited them into the shadow of the Almighty and encouraged them to find their lives and purposes there.

It is easy and tempting at times to fall into the shadow of another. As we witness Paul’s encouragement, may we see an invitation to find ourselves only in the shadow of the Almighty, to find our lives and purposes in Him alone.

“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”

Acts 20:24

Paul’s Travels after Leaving Ephesus

Read Acts 20:1-16, plotting Paul’s path on your map: *The Third Missionary Journey of Paul*.

Acts 20:1-3 briefly covers a good deal of time. While Paul was traveling in Macedonia (20:1), he wrote 2 Corinthians. We will look at some of his words in this letter to learn a little more about Paul and his companions’ experiences during that time.

1. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:12-14, what was one thing that spurred him on from Troas to Macedonia? From Paul’s words in verse 14, what had he learned that God would do regardless of where Paul and his companions traveled?
2. From 2 Corinthians 7:5-11, how were Paul and his team refreshed? What was his goal in correcting the Corinthians, and how did they respond?

Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was complicated at best. It seems he spent a lot of time correcting them, which doesn't usually sky-rocket one's popularity. Many in Corinth had responded positively to his correction, repenting and turning back to the Lord, which encouraged Paul and his co-laborer Titus. Some of the people of Corinth, however, continued in their sinful ways.

3. As Paul prepared for his third visit to Corinth, for what purpose had the Lord granted Paul authority according to 2 Corinthians 13:10?
4. What do you think it means to use correction to build up rather than to tear down? Who in your life has the authority to do this? How do you respond?

Paul did travel again to Greece (Acts 20:2-3), where he spent the majority of his three months in Corinth. While he was there, he wrote the letter to the Romans.

5. During this leg of his journey, Paul had many companions (Acts 20:4). According to Paul's own words in Romans 12:4-8, why is it important to live and serve in community?
6. In what communities are you actively involved? How do you see the body working together in the way that Paul described?

Continue to plot Paul's journey on your map, and note the apparent return of Luke at Philippi in Acts 20:5-6.

7. What happened to Eutychus in Acts 20:7-12? Go ahead and let your imagination roll. This is one of the most vivid scenes in all of Acts. Some questions to consider: How do you think people reacted? What do you think Paul felt? Where do you think Luke – the physician – was?

From Acts 20:13-16, mark Paul's journey on your map.

Paul's Address to the Ephesian Elders

Read Acts 20:17-38. Paul decided not to go to Ephesus for the sake of time, but he called the Ephesian elders to Miletus for a final meeting.

8. How is this audience different from the audiences of all of Paul's other recorded speeches to this point?

9. In Acts 20:18-21, Paul presents his own life among them as testimony. "You yourselves know..." he said to them. For three years he had dwelt among them. They had seen him live a life that backed up his message.
 - ❖ Whose life has testified to you of their faith in the Lord?

 - ❖ In front of whom do you live your life, and how does it testify of your relationship with the Lord?

10. From Acts 20:22-23, where is Paul headed, and what does he know awaits him?

11. Paul knew the sacrifice would be great. According to Acts 20:24, what would he make him feel that his sacrifice had been worth it? From 2 Timothy 4:7, which was written near the end of Paul's life, did he feel that he had succeeded his living out that mission?

12. Paul knew that he was likely leaving the Ephesians for the last time, never again to touch their faces this side of heaven. What was his consolation in his departure according to Acts 20:25-27?

13. For whom were the elders responsible according to Acts 20:28? Why do you think it was important they pay careful attention to *themselves* and then to all the believers under their care?

14. What did Paul specifically warn in Acts 20:29-30?

False teaching is an issue everywhere, and it continued to be an issue for the church at Ephesus. Paul later wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to Timothy who was stationed as a leader of the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

15. In 1 Timothy 1:3-7 and 6:3-5, how did Paul urge Timothy to recognize false teaching?

16. How did Paul tell Timothy to guard himself and the brethren against the false teaching in 1 Timothy 6:11-12, 6:20-21 and 2 Timothy 2:22-26?

Going back to Acts 20:33-35, we see that while Paul lived in Ephesus, he worked hard with his own hands to provide for himself.

17. In Acts 20:35, Paul gave a final exhortation to the Ephesian elders. In your own life, who are the weak? To whom might the Lord give through you?

As Acts 20:36-38 comes to a close, Paul leaves the Ephesians weeping on the shore. I am touched to remember again that these were real, live human beings with emotions as real and raw as yours and mine.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

Read Acts 21:1-16.

Focus on Acts 21:1-6 and plot out Paul's journey to Tyre on your map.

18. In Acts 21:7-8, with whom did the apostles stay when they got to Caesarea?
See Acts 8:26-40 as a reminder of who he is.

19. What were Philip's daughters according to Acts 21:9? How did that exemplify the fulfillment of Peter's words, quoted from the prophet Joel, in Acts 2:17-18?

20. In Acts 21:9-12, what did the prophet Agabus foretell?

21. What do you see about Paul's attitude toward prophecy in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20?

22. From Acts 21:12, how did the people want Paul to respond to the prophecy? In Acts 21:13, how did Paul choose to respond?

Finish mapping Paul's journey to Jerusalem from Acts 21:15-16.

Prepare for Life

It was only when they realized that they could not persuade Paul otherwise that the disciples in Caesarea said to Paul: "The will of the Lord be done!" (Acts 21:14). So often, we desire to protect our loved ones from harm at all costs, even the cost of their own obedience to the Lord's will. Of course there are times to speak up and to question another's decisions. We're put on this earth to have relationships with one another, to help each other to discern which way to go. But we must be careful that we don't cling to another too tightly. With the best of intentions, we might protect the ones we love most from God's perfect calling on their lives.

23. Of whom do you have trouble letting go, even when they are certain that they are following God's will for their lives?

24. Would you be willing to release your person to the will of the Lord?

Lecture Notes: Lesson 18