

Our journey through the Lenten Season has brought us back to the book of Acts. We have wandered without food, and we are hungry, lonely, and wondering.

The end of Jesus' fasting period is so fascinating, for a number of reasons.

**First of all, it is here at the end that he is met by the enemy – when he is at the end of himself, when he is weak.**

What should have been a moment of celebration and relief turned into a moment of intense confrontation, when Christ's identity and worth were dragged into question by his greatest enemy.

→ Be aware of this as we transition out of this time. You may find yourself likewise troubled. -I thought there would be clarity, relief, and confidence, and instead I feel weaker than ever. It is in these moments that the enemy comes in to lie, steal, and destroy.

In his whisperings of seductive half-truths, Satan loves to offer us temporary, attainable solutions to the true needs that we have.

To a hungry Christ, he offered bread made from stone – quickly satisfy yourself!

To the Son of Man, stripped of his natural comfort and security, he offered a test – make God prove his security to you!

To Jesus' lonely soul, isolated from others for forty days, he offered the kingdoms of the world – just concede, and the adoration of others will be yours!

THE KINGDOM IS NOT BUILT ON SHORTCUTS

**And yet, in all of this weakness, in all of this temptation, Christ had his face, his heart, set.**

His humanity may have struggled, but his divinity prevailed.

→ And he modeled, in the flesh, our response to all of the lesser joys.

Do not starve on the frivolities of the world when the nourishing, substantive bread of life is available to you.

Do not test God, asking him to prove himself, when he has proven himself before and will do it again, proving his love anew.

Do not be tossed to and fro by the approval of others – their praise is for a moment, until they find their new item of worship.

**Find your life in the God who loves you, and you will find yourself grounded for wherever he leads us next. The world around may change, the lights above may grow dim, and the trail may become scarce, but the One who promised he would never leave or forsake us has given us a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.**

WE AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE

1  
END OF SELF

2  
HALF TRUTHS

3  
PROVING SPIRIT

We find ourselves yet again in the book of Acts.

It has been some time since we have walked through this account together, so let's briefly review where we left off at the end of Chapter 19.

Chapter 19 portrays to us Paul's dealings in Ephesus. Scripture reveals to us three important interactions.

***First, Paul had to clarify the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which brings salvation.***

There were a group of twelve of John the Baptist's disciples who had only been baptized into John's name.

Paul had to patiently teach them that while John was a powerful voice, one that boldly preached the name of Christ and prepared the way for the Messiah, baptism into his name holds no power.

→ It is only the confession of faith in this God and his works, signified by the act of baptism <sup>regeneration</sup> into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that offers forgiveness and newness of life.

<sup>WE HEAR NEXT OF</sup>

***~~Paul next deals with the sons of Sceva, who were trying to conjure the power of God for their own selfish practices.~~***

They saw the way God moved mightily through Paul and desired to use the name of God for their own itinerant exorcisms.

Their attempt did not work, however, and a spirit quickly showed them with brute opposition that power without God is really no power at all.

This moment proved to be a powerful witness, and many in Ephesus came to repentance.

***These events culminated in a heated, confusing moment.***

A man named Demetrius, who along with others made their living by making sculptures of false gods, decided to riot against Paul and in favor of the goddess Artemis.

This threw Ephesus into mass hysteria, and the fruit of it was... nothing.

Paul was forbidden to share a sermon, indeed no one except the town clerk got a constructive word in.

The clerk convinced the crowd that the riot was a bad idea, and all went on their way.

It is after this busy time in Ephesus that we pick up with Paul. Where will he be led next?

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**Chapter 20 picks up right as this uproar has stopped. Like any worthwhile shepherd, Paul gathers up his flock and encourages them.**

Leave it to the apostle Paul to be strong, unshaken, even after such a chaotic event.

Even more impressive, perhaps, is his resolve to encourage his people – his selflessness is on full display as he loves his people even to the end.

After a while he says his goodbyes and heads northwest on his way to Macedonia.

**Paul's travels take him through Asia, Macedonia, and down into Achaia; all the while he was busy encouraging and equipping the churches as he passed by.**

Again his continual outpouring is on full display, his concern for the well-being and the heart of the congregations under his authority is clearly evident.

It seems that wherever Paul is going he is full to the brim with gospel energy and desire, which is pouring out into the lives of others, who are being built up in the Lord as he passes by.

May we learn from Paul's example and be so full of the love of Christ that others around us are continually built up.

**Eventually, Paul's travels brought him to Greece, where he settled down for three months after his long journey.**

The relief that must come among the presence of brothers and sisters after so long of a journey!

**When he prepared to leave by sail to return to Syria, a plot against him was made by the religious elites, who were striving yet again to halt his mission on behalf of God.**

→ This interruption altered his plans, and instead of heading straight to Syria, where he was eager to join his brothers and sisters in Jerusalem for Pentecost, Paul backtracked through all of the churches he just passed yet again.

And yet, in spite of this disappointment and alteration, **it will be made clear in the rest of this text that God had plans for Paul that did not include a direct path to his desired destination.**

God had work set aside for him that he did not know about, and although there was disappointment in the short term, although it seemed that his circumstances were working against him, although things were not working out, God had a plan for Paul in this moment.



So he begins to travel back...

- **Paul is joined by a handful of church leaders who not only bring offerings and gifts for the church in Jerusalem, but are bringing themselves.** Their monetary offerings are of great importance and help, but their physical accompaniment means a great deal
  - **They are proof to the Jerusalem Christians** that there are indeed genuine, thriving believers outside of their walls. This is a source of genuine encouragement and surging confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. *GOD LOVES PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE WALLS*
  - **Just as Christ came in the flesh** to offer the gift of salvation in person, if we can offer not just a check, not just a shoutout, not just a retweet, but the meeting of a genuine need in the flesh, we as followers of Jesus should do so.

After traveling at various speeds and in various means, Paul, Luke, and all other collected travelers **eventually meet in Troas**, where the meat of our story takes place today.

These first six verses of Chapter 20 are deeply interesting.

**On one hand, what we see are the blueprint/bullet points of Paul's travels.** He was here, he went there, these things happened, etc.

**But on the other hand, we know that life isn't this way.**

We aren't robots, we aren't chess pieces. There is more than meets the eye in any story.

This is a delicate balance.

**On one hand, we never want to read things into the bible that aren't there.**

We don't want to imagine false narratives, we don't want to define God in a manner that is not orthodox, we don't want to put our agendas, preferences, and personalities into a holy narrative.

**On the other hand,** we do want to study in a way that puts flesh and bone on the stories of the bible. We believe the bible, which means that we believe that this book records events that happened to real people, just like you and me, who had emotions, dreams, longings, hurts, etc.

If we look at the circumstances, and if we consider the heart of Paul, we see the joy and sorrow of the work of God.

- Joy: new leaders joining him, offerings brought, encouraging the churches, fellowship of believers.
- Sorrow: Corinth, not yet in Rome, plots against him, setbacks.

Never the circumstances that dictate us. Never the outcomes that lead us to faithfulness or retreat. Paul is always clear: no matter what comes, it is the great purpose and joy of God that buoys our efforts and affections.

Road text along

In Troas, Paul meets up with saints, who are gathered to break bread (Acts 2).

After seven days of fellowship, Paul intended to leave the next day, so he “prolonged his speech until midnight” ... hoo boy

Verse 8 informs us that many lamps were lit, which means, for one, that it’s late. It also means that the room is getting very warm...

And a young man named Eutychus, doing his best, fell asleep while Paul was still... talking... Being overcome by sleep, he fell out the window, three stories, ...

FINISH TEXT.

Some might say that the application point for this is that there are perils to preaching a long time.

Some might say if you believe enough, you can raise people from the dead.

But the language here is not here on accident. (HIST ACCT, BUT DEEPER MEANING → “ON SPIRITUAL LEVEL” BOTH TRUE)

***I don’t know about you, but I relate to young Eutychus.***

I do my best to be attentive. I’m even in community, surrounded by people who know the Lord. I’m present, I’m listening, I’m doing everything I’m “supposed” to do.

***And yet, I’m not engaged. I’m falling asleep at the wheel. Maybe I’m gazing out the window.***

→ The text says that Eutychus was “overcome” by sleep – sometimes we wander in, but sometimes we are just overtaken by life.

Eventually I get so disengaged that I fall. Maybe you even fall far. Maybe you even fall so far that you feel like your life is over.

***Listen: if you don’t think this happens to you, to the person to your left, to the person to your right, you are being blissfully ignorant.***

***Sometimes when we get here, to the shame of the church, we get left for dead.***

OR, TO OUR SHAME, WE LEAVE OTHERS

***But what happens here?***

***Paul disengaged himself from his “important” ministry work***

***went down, bent over him, took him in his arms, and spoke,***

***“Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.”***

***When he can’t do anything himself, someone goes to get him and proclaims – there is still life in you! It may seem all over, but there is still life in you!***

***Maybe today you need someone to come get you, but maybe you need to go get someone***

This story works another way – Ephesians 2

We were dead... but Paul/but God!

Paul took him in his arms, God raised us up and seated us with him.

*To conclude the narrative, Paul and his people end up in Mitylene, just south of Ephesus.*

Though he considered visiting Ephesus, he wanted to see the people there, he kept moving to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost

SET TABLE