

More Than a Little Comfort & Encouragement

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 20:1-12 / May 24, 2026

Introduction:

There are some helpful questions to ask when studying biblical narrative like the book of Acts. Why is a story recounted the way it is? Are there curious details included or excluded? And is it directly connected to what comes before or follows? Last week, Adam beautifully brought us back into our study of Acts, working through the conclusion of Paul's time in Ephesus up to verse 1 in chapter 20. Our passage appears to be connected to Luke's ending thoughts on the Ephesus riot, and Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders that will follow. This indicates it may serve as a transition story. I believe the key to understanding Luke's purpose is observing how he builds the setting, expounding on how,

God Supplies His People with Constant Comfort & Encouragement

Pay attention to how quickly Luke moves through Paul's travels in verses 1-3, and where his emphasis falls. Look at verses 1-3, "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia." Paul did not leave Ephesus under duress but took time to encourage the disciples there. Then he is immediately shown encouraging those in the regions around Macedonia. A version of the Greek term for "encouraging" will be repeated another time at the end of this story in verse 12. Each version stems from the verb *parakaleō*, used for an appeal, exhortation, encouragement, comfort, or consolation. In Acts, some form of this term is used around nine times to describe Paul's ministry to believers, with a notable previous use in Acts 14:22 where Paul previously encouraged the churches in these areas before establishing elders in every church. I don't think it's an accident that Luke bookends this story by using this term to describe Paul's ministry before he left Ephesus, in the regions surrounding Macedonia, and in Troas. And all before calling the Ephesian elders together for a final exhortation. It seems this term is Luke's point of emphasis. The detail about spending three months in Greece before returning through Macedonia is also interesting. Those three months would have been in Corinth, following the delivery of 2 Corinthians with personal encouragement and would be where he wrote Romans to encourage the church in Rome as well. Finally, note how this links back to Acts 19:21, which tells us, "Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem." From Paul's letters, we know he was going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection he received from the Gentile churches for their needs. This suggests the traveling in verses 2 and 3 was primarily for that collection. Consider this with me. Commentators note how the report of these visits is the shortest in Acts, yet his time there likely held significant appeals and encouragements for these Gentile churches to care for the saints in Jerusalem. Why would Luke leave out details of those encouragements? I'm persuaded it's because the letter's original recipient, Theophilus, would know the success of Paul's collection efforts in encouraging the churches to give and Luke wants to connect those efforts with the rest of the story. The final part of the setting, then, launches us into the main story, which reveals how,

God Supplies Comfort & Encouragement through His People, Word, and Presence

Note the careful attention Luke gives to identifying these men and what it reveals. Look at verses 4-6, "Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days." Each person listed is connected to Gentile churches from Paul's missionary journeys that participated in the collection for Jerusalem. Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, and Luke respectively. Derbe and Lystra by Gaius and Timothy. And Ephesus by Tychicus and Trophimus. Only Corinth is missing in this list, but we may be able to presume Paul himself represented Corinth.

Why does Luke intentionally note how each church sent representation with their collection? I believe it emphasizes comfort and encouragement coming through God's people. Family, the churches were not satisfied with sending money only. They wanted a physical presence to communicate their love for the church in Jerusalem. And each representative is with Paul in Troas. Have this increase your sense of the encouraging presence of God's people that permeates this story before we continue. Look at verse 7, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight." This is the earliest evidence of an early church gathering. Likely on Sunday, as Luke follows Roman time keeping in verses 7 and 11, believers gathered at the close of the workday for a common meal, that included remembering Christ's sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, and some form of exhortation or teaching. Do you feel the palpable sense of joy in this gathering as they remain engaged in Paul's instruction until midnight? Notice the story's problem, then, in verses 8-9, "There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead." The details of many lamps either communicate the late hour or stuffy atmosphere in the room. The Greek for "young man" may indicate Eutychus is a man in his thirties, or a boy between ages nine to fourteen. "Youth," in verse 12, could mean a slave or child. Interestingly, his name means "lucky" or "good fortune." Now, the story is clear that he's trying to stay awake while Paul kept going. Perhaps he moved to the window for better air, until he finally dozed off, fell out the window and died. It's tempting to follow one pastor and suggest this shows the dangers of falling asleep in church, but that isn't close to Luke's point. His point is to have this tragic accident, interrupting Paul's extended encouragement, serve as the story's climax in preparation for the resolution. While some try to deny he was really dead, John Stott appropriately points out how, "Luke declares that he was dead," and "as a doctor he could vouch for it" (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 320). Look at verse 10, "But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.'" Verse 10 is an echo or allusion of various resurrection miracle accounts like Jesus raising the widow's son at Nain in Luke 7, Jarius' daughter in Luke 8, and Lazarus in John 11. Or Peter raising Dorcas in Acts 9. However, the most telling allusion is to stories in first and second Kings, both involving a dead child raised to life. Listen to those events. 1 Kings 17:21-22, "Then he [Elijah] stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.' And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived." 2 Kings 4:32-34, "When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord. Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm." Paul's actions clearly mirror the prophets, confirming that when he says, "his life is in him," Paul is not indicating he didn't really die but was restored to life. Church, this is a resurrection miracle and indication of God's powerful presence. Notice what Luke records next in verses 11-12, "And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted." Rather than staying focused on the miracle, Luke returns immediately to bread being broken and Paul extending his instruction until daybreak before mentioning Eutychus taken away alive and the church being "not a little comforted." Which, if you remember, Adam showed is phrasing Luke uses to emphasizing their comfort. Family, Luke is intentionally not making God's miraculous power the center of this story. Breaking bread together and Paul's instruction are the most crucial aspects of this story. I think this is important to note because, while God's power in raising Eutychus was real and comforting, it was not the only indication of His presence, nor the main encouragement for the church that day.

The fellowship of the Lord's people, proclamation of the Lord's Word, participation in the Lord's Supper, and sign of the Lord's presence all brought comfort and encouragement to God's people. God supplies the comfort and encouragement we constantly need through all of these things, not just miracles. So, what might can take away from this story? First,

1) Meaningfully Participate in the Gatherings of the Church

I don't know about you, but I was struck by the church's participation in this story, both how representatives from each church traveled with their collection and how long people gathered for fellowship and the Word. These are striking commitments to be with God's people. When you combine this with Luke's description of early church life in Acts 2:46-47 where we were told, "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people," it's hard not to question how far the American Church has drifted from this kind of meaningful participation. I remember two moments in life that challenged my level of participation. First, in high school, I attended a church of a different culture. The gathering started at 10:00am and we weren't done worshipping until 2:00pm. That blew me away coming from churches whose gatherings had to wrap up in under an hour and a half or people were noticeably upset. Second, was a question from my brothers from India and Africa in our first year in Abu Dhabi. They asked me why our church didn't hold all night worship gatherings on Christmas and New Years Eve. You heard that correctly, their culture gathers on Christmas and New Years Eve to worship through the night until the morning comes. Can you imagine if we tried that? I remember fumbling through an answer only to realize once again that my commitment to be with God's people, hear from His Word, and rejoice in His grace was far lower than my brothers and sisters from these countries. Let's get real family. What is our level of commitment to meaningfully participate in the gatherings of the church? Do we strive to gather as regularly as possible? When we gather, do we come in anticipation for God to be present among us? This isn't to guilt you into anything. But, if Luke is showing how the fellowship of the Lord's people, proclamation of the Lord's Word, participation in the Lord's Supper, and sign of the Lord's presence are how God supplies comfort and encouragement, then maybe, just maybe, we are missing out on significant comfort and encouragement through our approach to these things. I don't know how to solve the gap of how far it appears we have come from this example in Scripture, but I am convicted by it. Second,

2) Find Specific Comfort & Encouragement in the Resurrection

I did not see this myself when I first read this story, but I think John Polhill's observation is worth considering. He notes, "In the New Testament, miracles of raising from the dead present an implicit symbolism of the resurrection. In the case of Lazarus it is quite explicit. Indeed, in the present case there are some rather strong linkages with the resurrection. It was Easter time. The Passover had just ended, the season of Jesus' death and resurrection (v. 6). It was the first day of the week, the day of Jesus' resurrection (v. 7); and, given the season, Paul may well have been expounding on that event. The restoration of Eutyclus's life was a vivid reminder to the Christians of Troas that the Jesus whom Paul had been preaching was indeed the resurrection and the life" (John B Polhill, The New American Commentary: Acts, p. 419). I would be remiss if I didn't end on this observation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our hope. It confirms it was finished on the cross. His sacrifice has atoned for our sins. And God's wrath has been satisfied. It proclaims our trust in Jesus is not in vain because our sins are forgiven and our future is secure. As Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:17-20, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." And then, later, in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of reflection and response, consider what this means family. This story gives a glimpse into what awaits all who trust in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Life everlasting with all of God's people enjoying the all-satisfying presence of God together. Death will never have the final word. Pain and Sorrow won't last. Joy will come in the morning. And all you do in this life for the glory of God will be rewarded. Let the truth of Jesus as the resurrection and the life lead you to greater desires to be comforted and encouraged by God through the fellowship of the Lord's people, proclamation of the Lord's Word, participation in the Lord's Supper, and power of the Lord's presence when His people gather together for these things. Would you pray with me as we prepare to respond together?