

A Window into Paul's Ministry  
Series: Fully Devoted Followers  
Acts 20:7-16  
Sunday, October 10, 2021

I'll tell you a story about one of the longest days of my life. I was serving with a team on a trip to South Asia. We had been in the country for about a week, teaching at a ministry conference. These were busy, hot, ministry-filled days. After the conference, we flew to another region of the country, and drove eight hours along a windy mountain road until we arrived at our destination.

The longest day began that next morning with our drive to a children's home located in a small village. It was a wonderful day of ministry, meeting with a great number of kids and villagers. But we were tired. The temperature all week had been around 105°F, and we had been serving from sun up to sun down. By evening, when we thought we were going back to our hotel, we were surprised with the news that there was a special evening service planned and our team was asked to lead it. Fortunately, my friend Jim, the other pastor on the trip, agreed to give the impromptu sermon. All I had to do was close the service in prayer.

Since none of the villagers knew English, and our team didn't know their language, the sermon had to be translated one sentence at a time. It was late in the evening, it was dark, it was still hot, and our team was exhausted. Before long, I found myself fighting off sleep. I couldn't keep my eyes open. Even though I could still hear Jim preaching, I soon was sound asleep.

And then, barely aware of my surroundings, I heard Jim say, "And now, Pastor Eric will come and lead us in a word of prayer." With a surge of adrenaline, my eyes popped open and I shot up, grabbed the microphone, and began to pray. And to this day, I have no idea what I said. When I finished and returned to my seat, my whole ministry team was trying to hide their laughter and I was trying to hide my embarrassment. That was one of the longest days of my life.

I empathize with Eutychus, the young man whose tragic accident and subsequent miracle takes center stage in the passage that was read for us. But while Eutychus is the unfortunate elephant in the room, this story is not just about this young man. I believe that Luke records the events of that day and the following travelogue as another example of God's sovereign plan to establish healthy churches through the ministry of Paul and his companions. This is a story about God's mighty power at work in the book of Acts. But it's also a story about *time*.

In Acts 20:7-16, there are thirteen different references to time. If we include verse 6, which bridges our passage to last Sunday's text, we find three more references to time, a total of sixteen in eleven verses. I think that's significant. We're given a window not only into Paul's ministry, but also into the priorities of Paul's team and

the churches they planted. One way to measure the health of a church is to observe its priorities. How do Jesus's followers make use of their time?

Notice first, that **Paul and his ministry team made time for the church in Troas**. We left off last Sunday in verse 6, when Paul and his team arrived in the city of Troas. But it couldn't be a long visit if Paul wanted to stick to his agenda. We see Paul's sense of urgency in verse 16, noting that he wanted to return to Jerusalem by Pentecost. That meant Paul had to travel over 600 miles in less than 5 weeks.

A week in Troas isn't much of an investment of time, but let's remember that this wasn't their first visit. In chapter 16, the team first arrived in Troas as part of a divine detour.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas” (Acts 16:6-8, NIV).

We don't know how long they stayed, but once again, through divine intervention, Paul found himself rerouted.

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days” (Acts 16:9-12, NIV).

In these verses, we're given a clue about the origins of the church in Troas. It seems that Paul connected with a believer there who may have been instrumental in planting the church. Did you catch who it might be? In these verses, Luke, the narrator, starts using the pronoun *we* to describe Paul and his friends during this visit. Then in chapters 17-19, the pronouns switch back to *they*. But guess who's back in chapter 20 when the team returns to Troas? Luke! Look at Acts 20:6 and notice the reappearance of the word *we*. Luke is once again along for the ride.

What does all this have to do with making time for the church in Troas? Though Luke doesn't record all the details, Bible scholars estimate that seven years had passed between the two visits. And while there's no letter from Paul to this church, it's reasonable to believe from these accounts that Luke had some kind of ministry in Troas over this seven-year period. We can't know for sure, but we can conclude that

Paul and his friends didn't just sail around the Mediterranean, visiting cities a week at a time, dropping off the gospel and then sailing on to the next port. Paul and his companions invested years into these believers' lives in order to develop healthy, gospel-centered churches. **Paul and his ministry team made time for the church in Troas.**

As Paul, Luke, and the rest of the team made time for the church in Troas, so too did the church in Troas make time for gospel ministry in their context. I want to show you three ways in which they made time for gospel ministry, and in each case, I want us to learn from their priorities in ways that we can apply to our own lives.

First, **the church in Troas made time for gospel-centered worship.** As Luke sets the scene for what was to happen to Eutychus, we also get a snapshot of what the believers were doing as they gathered together. Luke mentions in verse 7 that it was the first day of the week and that the believers, along with Paul's team, had gathered together to break bread. This would likely have been a Sunday evening after the locals had finished their workday. They came together for more than an evening meal. Breaking bread meant that they were also sharing in the Lord's Supper. And, as we'll see in a moment, Paul was preaching as part of their gathering. This fits well with the pattern established back in Acts 2:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42, NIV).

Here in Acts 20, we get an early look at the church gathering for Sunday worship. There's no record of whether they sang songs or took up an offering the way we do on a Sunday morning. But this was Sunday church. This was gospel-centered worship. The church in Troas made time on Sunday, *the Lord's Day*, to gather together as the church. And it's safe to assume that this was their habit every Sunday.

Have you ever heard that term, *the Lord's Day* used in reference to Sunday? In one sense, we might speak of Sunday as *the Lord's Day* because it was on a Sunday, the first day of the week, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. So it seems that the first Christians made Sunday their day of corporate worship because the first day of the week pointed them back each week to the resurrection and the truth of the gospel. It's no coincidence then that Paul would give the following instruction to the churches he helped plant:

“Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Cor. 16:1-2, NIV)

We're going to see that on this Lord's Day, the church in Troas made the day—the whole day—a day of gospel-centered worship.

So, what if every week we, as fully devoted followers of Jesus, started thinking in terms of Sunday as the Lord's Day? Not just from 8:30 to 9:35, or 10:45 to 11:50. What if the *whole* day were devoted to worship?

I'm not advocating for longer services, or that we pastors preach all-day sermons (though I'm willing to give it a shot). I'm not saying we should log more hours in the building or aim for perfect Sunday attendance. But what if, instead of offering morning worship as the firstfruits of our Sunday, we chose to offer the Lord's Day as the firstfruits of our week? All of it. What if our Sunday plans didn't determine our availability for worship, but our commitment to Sunday worship determined how we made our Sunday plans? Here are two quick examples of ways that we can make time for gospel-centered worship and make Sunday *the Lord's Day*.

First, take the advice I see posted online every weekend from Dean Inserra:

“Sunday morning church is a Saturday night decision.”

It's not a Saturday night decision *if* you'll come to worship on Sunday. It's a Saturday night decision *that* you'll be there, and that you'll make the necessary plans so that Sunday morning *will* be a part of your Lord's Day worship.

Second, don't waste the opportunities you have for Lord's Day discipleship. If the pandemic taught us anything, we know that the shared discipleship opportunities that we have could at any moment be taken away. You want to know why there aren't many Sunday School or Formation Group options available right now? Part of the answer is that the demand for these is relatively low. And there's a reason why tonight I'll only set out a dozen or so chairs in the chapel for *Second Sunday Prayer* rather than planning to meet in the much larger Youth Room or in the Sanctuary.

I'm not here to scold anyone or to lay a guilt trip. I'm just saying that many of us are missing out on some great opportunities for Lord's Day discipleship. I am encouraged that we had 30+ people here last Sunday morning for the new Jonah study. I'm just praying that they'll need to move to a bigger room. **The church in Troas made time for gospel-centered corporate worship.** We would do well to do the same.

Luke tells us in verse 7 that because Paul intended to leave the next day, his teaching continued on until midnight. And as Paul preached on into the night, Eutychus drifted off to sleep, not because the message was so boring, but because the hour was so late. Even after Paul's preaching was interrupted by Eutychus's deadly fall and miraculous recovery, we're told in verse 11 that Paul preached on until daylight.

What made Paul keep preaching? What made the church want to keep listening? We don't know exactly what Paul was speaking about or what scriptures he was teaching from, but in reading Acts and Paul's New Testament letters, we have a pretty good idea. Paul would have preached about the transforming power of the gospel. This was his consistent message wherever he went. For example, when he sent his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul wrote,

“[I]t is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Php 1:9-11, ESV).

Here is a second way these believers prioritized their time: **the church in Troas made time for gospel instruction.** Paul's teaching went on and on not because he couldn't stop preaching, but because the church couldn't stop listening. They wanted more of the gospel.

How are you making time for gospel instruction? Are you actively engaging in gospel instruction that consistently exposes you to the transforming power of Jesus? If so, encourage someone with what you're learning. If you're not, here are three easy ways to take the next step.

One, every Sunday, read the passage of Scripture that we'll be working through before, during, and after the sermon. We preview what's next in the bulletin every week. Simply, pre-read the passage at home. Then, with your Bible open on Sunday morning (assuming you're bringing it with you), follow along as the passage is read and as the word is preached. Then, at some point during the week, work your way back through the text. Use the Life Group Questions to guide you, or if you're a note taker, review what you jotted down.

Two, take the next step by reading to fill in the gaps. Pick up a good book that will engage your mind and heart with gospel-rich instruction. Read a book on prayer, God's grace, the cross, or even a book on theology. Books aren't the only means of gospel instruction, but God has used the printed word in amazing ways to teach his people the transforming power of the gospel.

Three, take the next step by making the most of your daily devotions. In two weeks, we'll be offering a three-part class called *Jump-Starting Your Daily Devotions*. This short class is designed to help each of us form healthier habits when it comes to time with God in scripture and prayer. Too often our devotions resemble a spiritual vitamin—they're somewhat nutritious, but by no means filling. Other times our devotional habits are more like fast food—very filling, but lacking in nutrients. What

we really need is time with God that looks more like a home-cooked meal—a meal that not only fills us up, but also fuels healthy growth.

Some of you may still be thinking about Eutychus, some who want to hear more of his story, and some, who like Eutychus, are wondering if this sermon will ever end. The last way in which these believers invested their time has everything to do with Eutychus. **The church in Troas made time to care for one another.**

Even though it was a terrible accident, we might laugh at the fact that poor Eutychus took a nose-dive out of a third-story window because he fell asleep in church. But it's important to notice that when tragedy struck, the church knew when to pause and focus on caring for this brother. In verse 10, Luke describes how Paul interrupted his sermon to care for the young man. By his grace, God performed a miracle to bring this dead boy back to life. But notice how the story ends for Eutychus in verse 12. The church not only brought the young man back home, we see that they, as one body, were greatly comforted that Eutychus was going to be okay.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:26 that in the body of Christ,

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Cor. 12:26, NIV).

These believers were not just a group of folks attending church together. They were one family. We see this both in how they cared for Eutychus and in how they served one another. Notice the seemingly unimportant detail provided in verse 8. In the upstairs room where the church had gathered, there were many lamps. In the days before electric light, this would have been necessary. Maybe it's just me, but do you wonder who took the time to light all those lamps in preparation for Sunday? Whose house were they meeting in to gather together and break bread? And for that matter, who baked enough bread and prepared the fellowship meal for the believers to enjoy together? We don't know.

But isn't that often the case in churches today? Many of us come to church and enjoy a Sunday morning together because a whole group of behind-the-scenes volunteers have done a ton of work to make us feel welcome, loved, and served when we arrive. We don't always know who made the coffee, baked the goodies, decorated the Sanctuary, or cleaned up the mess that we never saw. It just gets done, without fanfare or recognition. Yes, our staff carries some of the load, but so much happens around here that the staff have nothing to do with.

But to be honest, some of our behind-the-scenes servants are starting to wear out. We need some new recruits. We need some folks to wash the feet of those who have been

washing our feet for years. And the greatest challenge to recruiting fresh servant-hearted volunteers is that all of us, myself included, are *just too busy*.

How can we possibly make time for one another if we barely have enough time for ourselves? Yes, there are seasons of life when time is scarce. Yes, we need time for self-care. But what if we took just one thing off of our crazy calendars in order to make *more* time for one another? I can't tell you what that thing is or how you're going to make it happen, but we need people who behind the scenes will light the lamps. We need to create enough margin in our busy lives so that when our Eutychus moment comes, we'll be ready to stop and care for those in need. **The church in Troas made time to care for one another.**

The church in Troas wasn't a perfect church. But what we see is evidence of the gospel transforming the lives of believers, so that they made time for gospel-centered worship, time for gospel instruction, and time to care for one another. May the gospel of Jesus Christ have this same transforming impact on our church and on each one of us that calls E-Free Bemidji our home.