

# **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 21 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 20**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After the uproar in Ephesus was over, Paul called the disciples to meet him. Although it is not mentioned whether he said anything to them, one can safely comment that he must have encouraged them to be courageous and strong in the faith, and to live worthy of their calling as God's new and holy people. He embraced and kissed them as was the manner of the people then.<sup>1</sup>

Paul had earlier declared that he was determined to go to Jerusalem to be in time for Pentecost. But there was little time left for him to revisit the churches which he had established before he made his last trip to Jerusalem. In this chapter, Luke detailed Paul's itinerary from Ephesus to Miletus by way of Macedonia, Greece, then re-tracked via Macedonia, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene and Samos. At Troas, Luke gives an account of the miraculous return to life of Eutychus on the last day of Paul's stay there. Eventually, Paul arrived at Miletus and Ephesus was just about thirty miles north of it. It would have taken him more time to visit Ephesus and then to

return to Miletus to continue his journey to Jerusalem. In this case, he might not make it in time for Pentecost. Instead, he called for the Elders of the church in Ephesus to come to him in Miletus. The Elders would take about three days to reach Miletus. In Miletus, Paul gave his farewell speech to the Elders. The speech was about him and it was also instructive. He touched on many themes, for example, the grace of God and His kingdom, the redeeming blood of Christ, repentance and faith, the suffering of Christians, the danger of false teachers, and the need for vigilance.

The chapter can be divided into two main sections: (1) Paul's journey from Ephesus via Macedonia and Greece to Miletus (20:1-16); and a subsection on his one week stay in Troas (20:6-12); (2) Paul's address to the Elders of Ephesus in Miletus (20:17-35); and the chapter ends with the emotional parting of Paul and all the Ephesian Elders and others (20:36-38).

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **Paul's Tour of Macedonia**

Paul revisited the churches in Macedonia, which he had founded on his second missionary journey. He had not revisited these churches since their founding. His purpose was to establish the Christian disciples and he did it by "much exhortation". It was a vital ministry to strengthen and build up the faith of the young Christians so that they might be able to withstand persecutions for Christ's sake and in some places, the work might be enlarged. When he came to Greece, he stayed three months in Corinth probably because it was winter and travelling would be

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 31:35 And she said to her father,  
Romans 16:16 Salute one another with an  
holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

difficult. His original intention was to proceed from there to Jerusalem (19:21), but it was revealed to him that the hostile Jews wanted to kill him (20:3). These hostile Jews hated his zeal and diligence for the gospel. Paul changed his plan at the last moment when he was about to board the ship. He decided instead to go back through Macedonia once more. Luke gives a list of Paul's travelling companions. These names were given probably because they were known by the churches there: Sopater of Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy of Lystra, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Ephesus. Paul's entourage would be about eight people including Luke the physician. These Christians who accompanied Paul were bringing money collected from the Gentile churches as a gift to the poor believers in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> These travelling companions went ahead to Troas and they were to stay there until Paul and Luke came. Although Paul would not have the Gentiles burdened with Jewish ceremonial laws, he did not leave Philippi until "the days of unleavened bread" (the Passover) were over. Paul did not want to offend the Jews. Then they left the city by ship for Troas. The journey took five days.

### **Paul's Ministry in Troas**

They stayed a week in Troas. And on the first day of the week, the Christians gathered together to "break bread," which means they kept the Lord's Supper. Now the first day of the

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 15:25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. 26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

week according to the Roman calendar was a Sunday. This is the earliest clear evidence to show that the Christians practised gathering together for worship on that day.<sup>3</sup> On this day, Paul preached to them. It was a very long sermon. It continued until midnight. Luke mentioned that there were "many lights", which means "candle lights", in the upper room, which was on the third storey of the house. It was crowded and Eutychus, a young man, was sitting on the ledge of a window listening to Paul's sermon. He was tired probably and he fell into a deep sleep and the next thing that happened was he fell down to the ground. Paul stopped his preaching and with the others, they went down to him. He was taken up dead. If Luke, the physician, reported that Eutychus was dead, then he must be dead and not in an unconscious or comatose state. Paul, however, "fell on him and embracing him" said that his life was in him. This was a miracle in which Eutychus was brought back to life. Paul's action reminds us of the way Elijah raised to life the widow Zarepath's dead son and Elisha the Shunamite's son.<sup>4</sup> They went back to the room and Paul continued with his preaching as he would depart the next day. Paul

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:2 Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 17:21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

2 Kings 4:34 And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

preached till the dawn of the day. It was a long sermon but it showed how Paul was deeply concerned and how he cared for the Christians. After his preaching, he bade farewell to them and departed. The Christians were much comforted by the miraculous raising of Eutychus. Once again, God gave Paul the power to raise him in order to encourage His people to remain steadfast and faithful.

Luke was with Paul's entourage as indicated by the pronoun "we" (20:13). They left Troas by ship and sailed to Assos, a sea-port town on the north-west of Asia Minor in the province of Mysia, a distance of about thirty miles by sea. But Paul chose to walk to Assos, a distance shorter by about ten miles on foot along the Roman road. By going on foot, Paul could go into some small towns and villages to scatter the seed of the gospel. He might not be able to return to these regions anymore. At the same time, he could spend time alone with God. Paul reached Assos and as planned, he met Luke and the others. This time, Paul joined them in their ship that sailed to Mitylene, which was the chief city of the island of Lesbos on its east coast. The entourage stayed in the beautiful place for one day. They sailed past Chios (or Kios) and arrived at the island of Samos where they stayed at Trogyllium. The next day, they sailed to Miletus, a seaport town that was about thirty-five miles south of Ephesus.

### **Paul's Farewell Address to the Elders of Ephesus**

Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus with the intention of visiting the church. But because the 35-mile journey would take about three days (and a return trip means another three days),

he might not be able to make it for Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. He therefore requested the Elders of the Ephesian church to come to Miletus so that he could speak to them for the last time. These Elders were not old people. The word "Elder" is a title given to them to indicate their responsibility in the church. They were either pastors or overseers. Clearly, the church in Ephesus had a team of Elders looking after the congregation. So when they came, Paul addressed them. Interestingly, this was the only speech that was addressed to a totally Christian audience in Acts. All others were either evangelistic sermons to Jewish people or Gentiles, or they were legal defences either to the Sanhedrin in the early days or before Jewish and Roman authorities.

Paul's speech to the Elders was remarkable. One would expect him to spend a greater part of his speech exhorting and defending the Christian faith. Instead, he offered himself as a model by which they could defend and take care of the church. Whereas he spent a quarter of his speech in exhorting defence of the church, he spent the rest of his speech in speaking about his behaviour towards the church during the years he was with them, and what it was really like to serve the Lord. Paul's speech can be divided into three portions. He began by speaking about his past – "after what manner I have been with you at all seasons" (20:18). Then he talked about his future plan – "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem," (20:22). He ended with a solemn call to the Elders to "take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (20:28).

Paul needed to defend himself because there was a vicious smear campaign launched against him in Thessalonica and in Ephesus.<sup>5</sup> Paul appealed to four aspects of his attitude as a servant of the Lord. He said that he served the Lord with “all humility of mind” or maybe his humiliation like the one in Philippi.<sup>6</sup> He spoke of “many tears”, indeed of compassion, over the spiritually ignorant and blind Gentiles, and the hardened and perverse Jews. He mentioned the “temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews”. These “temptations” were trials and testing of his faith and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ during his missionary journeys. And finally, Paul testified that he “kept back nothing that was profitable” to them. Anything that was profitable for their eternal and spiritual life, he would teach and counsel them. He did these publicly and also privately

by giving instruction to individuals and families in their homes. He spared no effort and time in evangelistic outreach to both Jews and Greeks to repent towards God and to have faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ (20:21).

Paul now shared with them what he purposed to do in his future ministry. He mentioned that he was greatly prompted by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem while he did not know what would happen to him there (20:22). However, he mentioned in every city which he visited, the Holy Spirit warned him that he would experience imprisonment and hardships. But Paul shared with them that he was not discouraged and deterred by these things. He did not regard his life as more important than finishing the “course” or race of the Christian life with joy, and completing the work of witnessing the good news of God’s grace which the Lord Jesus Christ had given him to do (20:24). Paul continued that he would not be seeing them again. Somehow, he could predict that this was the last time he could be with them. Lest anyone should charge him for not doing enough, he testified that he was “pure of the blood of all people” (20:25). What Paul meant is that he was not guilty of destroying their souls. They could not blame him for negligence on his part in preaching and teaching to save and build their souls. He said: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (20:27). By the “whole counsel of God”, Paul meant: (1) God’s command to evangelise and save souls (2) teaching the doctrine of the Christian faith as pertaining to holy living, and (3) protecting them from false teachers. With this note, Paul exhorted them to take heed concerning the present.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: 2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. 3 For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: 4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. 5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God *is* witness: 6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 16:22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Paul urged them to shepherd the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. But the Elders must keep watch over themselves first and only then could they take care of the flock. Paul was calling them to be good shepherds. A good shepherd guards and feeds the sheep! And the sheep were very precious and valuable to God for He had bought them with "His own blood". It was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, and this verse shows the intimate oneness of God the Father and His Son. Paul further warned that after his departing, "grievous wolves" meaning false teachers and prophets would infiltrate the church and destroy them. Moreover, there would be those within the church that would speak things contrary to the teachings of God with the intent of drawing the disciples to follow them. These are the self-seeking angels of light. They pretend to be part of the family of God but in reality they are servants of Satan. Their mode of operation is to draw men after themselves. Watch out for such individuals. They do not point you to Christ but to themselves. This is even more dangerous for these men would divide and devastate the church. Paul stressed that the Elders should "watch and remember". Once again, he told them that he had spent no less than three years teaching them without letting down and warning every soul "night and day with tears" (20:31).

Paul said that he prayed to God for them. Paul was leaving them. What resource could they have to keep them from the snares and dangers that would beset them on top of feeding the flock? He commended them to God and to the Word of His grace. This is a double resource. God was able to keep them by

His power. His Word revealed His faithfulness and promises to keep and build them up, and to reveal God's gift of inheritance to all those who were sanctified or set apart unto God!

Paul concluded his speech by saying that he had not taken any person's "silver or gold or apparel" (20:33). This is not a teaching against supporting full time workers. For Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:14, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." He had worked as a tentmaker to support the necessities of life and to share with those who were with him. The reasons were that the church did not provide or were too poor to provide. The servant of God must never under any circumstances "talk" about salary. The moment he does that or even thinks of it he has become a hireling. He serves the LORD who is His paymaster. God always knows best and will provide for His faithful servants. He offered himself as a model, which they ought to imitate. They ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who taught: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (20:35).

### **Paul's Departure for Jerusalem**

With that final note, Paul ended his speech, and he knelt down and prayed with them together. They were crying unashamedly and embracing and kissing him because they could see him no more. It was a very emotional parting. Soon after, Paul had to board the ship to Jerusalem. They accompanied him to the ship.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

The main thrust of the chapter is Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian

church Elders (20:17-35). But before we look into the practical lessons, let us look at Paul's journey from the time he left Ephesus to Miletus via Macedonia and Greece. Paul's care and concern for the churches was both astounding and exemplary. We are astounded by the time taken and the hardships he endured to re-visit the churches to encourage and strengthen the faith of the disciples. Indeed, Paul knew that they were always in danger of being persecuted for witnessing Christ and proclaiming the gospel to their countrymen. We can rightly imagine Paul working diligently and earnestly as he testified with tears preaching and teaching the young converts. In Troas, Paul preached a very long sermon. The people did not complain. They stayed on with Paul when he preached until the dawn of day. How many would do the same. Today, if a minister preaches for more than thirty minutes, the congregation grumbles. We have strayed a long way off the godly path of loving and savouring the Word of God. We must make a u-turn back. We should learn to help ourselves first to grow spiritually by conscientiously and faithfully reading and studying the Scriptures and doing the will of God, and to take advantage of the opportunities and facilities accorded to us for the study of God's Word. It is sad that the general attitude of Christians in churches today shows apathy towards the things of God. We have been ensnared by the materialism of the world. We need to change and draw nearer to God.

Paul's farewell speech highlights two essential things about Christians serving in the church of God, and about the responsibility of pastors. Paul presented himself as a model for

Christians to imitate. Paul was not boasting about himself. He knew that very well. He was saying that every Christian should be humble when they serve the Lord. How tempting it is for a Christian to boast of the many sacrifices he makes in serving the Lord. This should not be. A Christian should be sincerely concerned and caring for his fellow Christians. At the same time, he must also be prepared to be tested. He had to endure all kinds of people and meet a variety of problems and difficulties just as Paul experienced. The life of a Christian is a race in which he must be determined not only to complete the race but to do it joyfully. Every Christian is called to witness Christ to someone, to call people to repentance toward God, and to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

His reference to pastors begins with a call for them to take care of themselves first. If they could not take care of themselves, it is not likely that they would be able to take care of others. The church is not the building but the people. A pastor must never think that the church belongs to him. It belongs to God; it is God's church for He bought it with the precious blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, a pastor must watch his attitude towards the church and really take care of the flock. As a shepherd, a pastor has the grave responsibility of feeding the sheep and of protecting them. There are enemies from without that may be identifiable quite easily. However, enemies from within would be more difficult to detect. Whichever way, pastors must know who these enemies are and protect the flock by exposing them. It is quite difficult to deal with the situation when the enemy comes from within. Such dissident leaders would

have already drawn people to follow them. A split is bound to happen if the pastor does not expose them to protect the flock. The pastor facing such a problem needs much wisdom, strength and courage.

Paul was right in commending the leaders of the church to God and His Word of grace. Similarly, pastors today, no matter how committed and sacrificial they might be in feeding and caring for the people of God, should never depend on themselves but on God and His Word. It is therefore imperative that pastors preach and teach the church to know and fear God, and to read and study the Word of God. There is no other way. There is also no short cut. Pastors and Elders of the church must work as a team and get the work done to the praise and glory of His Name. AMEN.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** Acts 20:1-5; 2 Corinthians 8:1-21.

**Tuesday:** Acts 20:6-16; Hebrews 10:22-25.

**Wednesday:** Acts 20:17-27; 1 John 4:7-21.

**Thursday:** Acts 20:28-35; 2 Timothy 2:10; John 10:7-13.

**Friday:** Acts 20:36-38; Romans 8:35-39.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Describe the worship service and the Christians in Troas. How would you be affected by the Christians and the worship service there? How different was their worship service from that of your church?

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2. What actions and attitudes characterise Paul as a Christian leader? Should Christian leaders today possess the same qualities?

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3. Why is the church important and precious to God? How do you show your appreciation?

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4. What counsel does Paul give to those whom God has given positions of leadership, and how may they guard the flock against the dangers that threaten them? What warning and command did Paul give?

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3. Try to picture yourself in the church gathering depicted in verses 7:-12, and follow what was done, step by step. Do you find the same spirit in these Gentile believers as that in the first Jewish believers as described in Acts 2:42?

5. Why was Paul not afraid to leave the leaders and the church in their care? What are the dangers around, among and within us?

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**MORE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

1. Have you begun to find in your experience the truth of our Lord's words quoted at the end of Paul's address?
2. Describe the relationship and fellowship of the believers among themselves in this chapter? Are you experiencing the same in your church?