

Last time we met, we read about a riot in Ephesus. Some gentile tradesmen, who made their living by making and selling idols of Artemis to the people in the city, stirred up the crowd because they were losing money. So many people turned to faith in Jesus Christ that the demand for their idols diminished. This loss of revenue infuriated the tradesmen so that they demanded that Paul, and the church, be punished in order to promote the worship of Artemis, and thus increase the demand for their product.

Since Paul could not be found at the time when this event came to a head, they placed the guilt in other followers of Christ. Paul wanted to make a defense of the gospel to the crowd, but members of the church in Ephesus prohibited his involvement, because they feared for his life. God used the city clerk to defuse the situation, but it became obvious that Paul was no longer safe in Ephesus, and his ministry to the people in that city came to an end.

This event marks the beginning of the end of the third missionary journey, as Paul and his companions make their way back to Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost. Chapter twenty, and the first half of chapter twenty-one, record the events leading up to Paul's arrival in Jerusalem. In tonight's passage we gain insights into his ministry along the way. Please read along with me, Acts 20:1-12.

In chapter twenty, we have a very condensed account of Paul's travels on the third missionary journey. In chapter 19, Luke's focus is primarily on Paul's ministry in Ephesus, but once Paul left that city, he backtracked and revisited the churches throughout Phrygia, Mysia, Macedonia, and Greece. His purpose was to encourage and strengthen the churches. After spending three months in Greece, which is in the area of Athens and Corinth, the church uncovered a plot against Paul by the Jews in the region.

Paul had plans to sail for Syria, and then travel to Jerusalem, but when he found out about the plot against his life, he traveled by land, through Macedonia, where he collected the offering for the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem from the primarily gentile churches he helped to establish. Originally, Paul hoped to be in Jerusalem for Passover, but these delays forced him to change his plans to arrive by Pentecost.

As we observed throughout the book of Acts so far, Paul rarely traveled alone. The group of men mentioned in verse four are representatives from the churches who contributed to the Jerusalem offering. They went ahead of Paul, to rendezvous with him in Troas, the city where Paul received his call to go to Macedonia on the second missionary journey.

The plural pronouns, in verses five and six, inform us that Luke rejoined Paul and once again became a travel companion. Remember that in chapter 16, Paul left Luke in Philippi, to minister to the church. More than likely, Luke carried the offering from the Philippians. The days after Unleavened Bread tell us that this was in the spring of the year. The representatives of the churches met up in Troas, they pooled their offerings, and spent a week with the church in that city.

It is interesting to note that if we did not have Paul's letters to set context, we might miss the importance of the offering taken up for the Jewish brothers in Jerusalem. Luke leaves out this detail, but the offering was the driving force behind Paul's desire to return to that city. He reasoned that the gracious generosity of the gentile believers would go a long way to persuade the Jewish Christians to accept their gentile brothers in faith.

This offering reminds the church today of the value of supporting brothers and sisters who are in need. It underscores the principle of cooperative giving, that when churches work

together, they can often accomplish more than if each church worked independently. This is the idea behind the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Cooperative Program advances the kingdom of God, and the work of the church on many levels. As most of you know, we here at Hickory Hammock Baptist Church take issue with some of the stances recently taken by some of the leaders in the Convention. The Ethics and Religious Liberty arm of the SBC supports the construction of mosques, which make absolutely no sense. David Land, the current head of the International Missions Board, pushes a position that Southern Baptists ought to be able to send missionaries who speak in tongues into the Mission field. We, as a church, see conflict with our core doctrinal values in these positions. We want to support the good work done through the cooperative program, but we cannot in good conscious give support to institutions that do not hold to the contextual word of God.

If you attended last week's business meeting, you recall that we adopted a compromise. The dollars that we would otherwise give to the Cooperative Program will now be divided up, and used completely in cooperative missions efforts. Fifty percent of those dollars will be given directly to International Missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Twenty-five percent will be given to North American missions through the Annie Armstrong offering. In this way all of the money we give will go directly to missions. By cutting out the administration costs, we double the amount of money that will go directly to missions. The remaining twenty-five percent will be used to buy materials for missions' activities of our church, or to support missions for which we may not be directly involved. In this way, our church can make a greater impact upon cooperative missions efforts, without compromising our doctrinal beliefs.

During their week in Troas, Luke records a great miracle that God did through Paul. It happened on the first day of the week, when they gathered to break bread and to sit under Paul's preaching. This verse informs us that while the Jews met to worship on Saturday, the normal day for worship for the church, whether Jew or Gentile, was the first day of the week, Sunday. At that time, Jewish Christians still attended Synagogue on the Sabbath, but they would break bread, fellowship, and sit under the teaching of God's word, in the context of the gospel, on Sunday.

We also learn in this verse that Paul was probably the first Southern Baptist preacher because he prolonged his sermon until midnight. This, along with the fact that there were many lamps in the upper room, informs us that they met in the evening. Unlike most people today, the members of the early church had to work at their regular jobs on Sundays, but they made time to meet together after work, to share a meal, and to sit under the preaching of God's word.

The shared meal that they observed, we celebrate as the Lord's Supper. It was a time of remembrance, personal reflection, and Christian fellowship. On that night, the meal was probably a full meal, not just a symbolic cracker, and a small cup of grape juice.

The church met together in an upper room. It was probably in the home of an affluent member of the church, although it could have been at the business of one of the members. The architecture of the buildings in that day was such that the lower floors had many interior walls to support the rest of the structure, but the largest rooms were on the upper floors that needed only to support the rooftop.

The setting for this event is that the disciples were up on the third floor where a young man named Eutychus sat in an open window, and as the NIV translates it, Paul went on and on with his sermon. The lamps, which burned in the room, consumed much of the oxygen, and Eutychus began to get drowsy.

Don't be too hard on Eutychus. Tonight, I have not been preaching very long at all, and some of you look like you are getting pretty sleepy. We should not be too hard on Paul either. He probably knew in his heart that he would not be back that way, and he wanted to equip the church, the best he could, in the time he had with them.

As Paul went on and on, however, this young man fell into a deep sleep, and fell out the window to his death. Detractors of the bible might argue that Eutychus did not really die; he was just knocked out. Remember that at this point Luke writes as an eyewitness. He was a doctor. As a writer of historical fact, he reported that Eutychus really died from the fall.

The miracle then recorded is that God used Paul to raise the dead. In the Old Testament we have records of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead. Jesus raised the widow's son, Arius' daughter, and Lazarus from the dead. God raised many saints at Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus, Himself, arose from the dead. Peter raised Tabitha. There is a strong possibility that God raised Paul after the Jews stoned him in chapter 14. Here we have an account of Eutychus being raised from the dead.

I believe that the Lord preserved these accounts of resurrection to remind the church, for all ages, of the promise of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise of the resurrection is central to Christian faith. We believe that those who follow Christ in this life will follow Him in resurrection in the life to come.

It is for the hope of the resurrection that we reach out to our friends and family to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. When I think about people that I was close to, who died without knowing Jesus, my heart breaks. I am convicted that I did not do more to reach them. I have close friends today that have not come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, so that there is an urgency to share the gospel, while there is still time.

When we all get to heaven, I want my lost friends to be there too, and the only way that will happen is if they come to Jesus to be saved. For believers, the resurrection makes all the difference in how we view death, and it gives us comfort knowing that our brothers and sisters who go before us are in the presence of the Lord, and we too will go to be with Him when our time comes. Life after death is the hope in which we live, and it is the assurance we have of our salvation. Every account in scripture of someone coming back from the dead reinforces that hope.

After Paul encouraged the church by the resurrection of Eutychus, he did just what we might expect him to do. He preached all night long. I'm thinking that no one else dared to fall asleep, but also the miracle so thrilled the people's hearts, that they hung on his every word.

We see here another reference to breaking bread together, and we relate this to the Lord's Supper. Scriptural evidence tells us that the early church ate together every time they met, and they remembered the Lord, and His sacrifice, on every occasion. This is why we ask the Lord's blessings on the food before we eat. We remember Him. We thank Him, and then enjoy His blessings in fellowship with one another.

In our tradition here at Hickory Hammock Baptist Church, we do not celebrate the Lord's Supper every time we meet, although some churches do. We do, however, set aside four or five times a year, and center the entire service around the Lord's table to commemorate the Lord's sacrifice, and our salvation through faith in Him, just as we did a week and a half ago.

When Eutychus left the next morning, alive and well, it encouraged the whole church. I am sure it was something that they talked about and shared with others for many years. We have the event preserved in the word of God to be an encouragement to the church today, and as a witness to the grace of God to the lost world.

We should not shame anyone for being lost, because we were all lost at some time in our past. What would be a shame is to stay lost, after hearing the gospel. The good news is that while we are all sinners, Jesus died for our sins. He took our sins in His flesh, and nailed them to His cross. Sin and death have no victory over Him, because He arose from the grave, is alive today, and is coming again. The offer of God's grace remains open to every lost person. All he or she needs to do is to confess and repent of their sins, and trust Jesus as his or her personal Savior. If there are any here who need to come to Christ, or who have questions about how to be saved, I would love to meet with you, to help you come to Jesus.