

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Paul as Spiritual Leader

Acts 20:1-16

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 20. Let me give you a little sneak peek at what we are going to see later in this text. The Apostle Paul is going to raise someone from the dead, a boy named Eutychus. Eutychus fell asleep while Paul was teaching. He fell out of a three-story window and died. Paul rushed down and miraculously raised him from the dead. Why'd he do that? Why is this in the Bible?

Coincidentally I count seven times where something like this happens in the Bible:

- 1) Elijah raises the son of a widow from the dead (1 Kgs 17:17–22).
- 2) Elisha (Elijah's protege) raises the son of a Shunammite woman from the dead (2 Kgs 4:30–37).
- 3) Jesus raises Jairus's daughter from the dead (Matt 8:28–43).
- 4) Jesus raises the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11–15).
- 5) Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38–44).
- 6) The Apostle Peter, earlier in the book of Acts, raises Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–42).
- 7) And then, in our passage today (Acts 20:8–12), we'll see Paul raise a boy named Eutychus from the dead. He falls over dead listening to Paul's longwinded preaching. By the way, the name Eutychus means "lucky one."¹ That's apt, don't you think?

Now let me make one point of clarification about these "raisings," and then I want to ask a question again about our text today. These "raisings from the dead" need to be differentiated from Christ's resurrection and from our future resurrection.

"Why do you say that, Tony?" Well because Lazarus eventually died again later in life. So did Tabitha. So did Jairus's daughter. So did Eutychus. On the other hand, Jesus rose from the dead with a new, incorruptible body that will never die again. It was imperishable and incorruptible (see 1 Corinthians 15 for more on that). It was untarnishable. And ours will be too when we are resurrected in our new bodies. In fact, just to clearly differentiate terms, I'm going to use the word "revivification" instead of "resurrection" to differentiate those two realities.

So in today's passage we're going to see a revivification of a dead boy. And the question still remains—why? Why did Paul do that? Miracles in the Bible always have a purpose. They are not ends in themselves. So why did this happen? And why was this revivification recorded in Scripture?

To that you might say, "It was recorded in the Bible to teach pastors to not preach long sermons, Pastor Tony."² No, I don't think that's the case. I think instead this happened as part of a larger section of Scripture to show us the remarkable power of spiritual leadership displayed by the Apostle Paul.

This is a leadership that we can't perfectly emulate. I don't believe in apostolic succession. And we're not able to go around and indiscriminately raise people from the dead (truth be told, Paul didn't do that a lot either). But we can emulate some things with Paul. Paul's heart.³ Paul's character. Paul's

¹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 107: "Eutychus—a name which, ironically, means 'fortunate.' Fortune, however, did not rescue Eutychus. The providential and gracious power of God would come to his rescue."

² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 107: "Preachers like to use 20:7 as their justification for long-winded preaching."

³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 622: "In sum, this unit gives us a sense of Paul the pastor. Here he seeks to instruct his people as he departs. One of the highest priorities for Paul in ministry is that his people will be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he is gone. In a sense this is the Pauline legacy, to ensure that he leaves behind not a monument to himself, but Christians who are a monument to God in their faithfulness."

spiritually-minded love and leadership for people.⁴ We can emulate those things, and we should. “Imitate me as I imitate Christ,” Paul said (1 Cor 11:1; see also 1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6).

Go ahead and write this down in your notes. I want to give you today:

Five Activities of a Spiritual Leader.

These are modeled for you by the Apostle Paul. And here's #1.

1) They **build up** the church (Acts 20:1–2)

Spiritual leaders build up the church. Look with me at **verse 1**.

¹After the uproar ceased,

What uproar? Well, let me refresh your memory. “**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**” That uproar! For two hours, upwards of 20,000 people gathered in a theater and screamed that stupid chant. Then the town clerk was like, “**You know we could go to jail for this.**” So they went, “**Oh, forget this!**” And they went home.

¹After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for⁵ the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.⁶

I'm guessing the disciples were pretty shaken by this “uproar.” So Paul encourages them. He builds them up.

Look at **verse 2**.

²When he had gone through those regions⁷

What regions? The regions in Macedonia where he had previously planted churches: Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, etc.

²When he had gone through those regions [in Macedonia]⁸ and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.⁹

The key concept in these first two verses is “encouragement.” In fact, the Greek verb for “encourage” (παρακαλέω [parakaleō]) is used twice. Paul encouraged (παρακαλέω) the believers in Ephesus in **verse 1**. They needed encouragement after the uproar in the theater and the prospect of Paul's departure. And Paul also encouraged (παρακαλέω) the churches in Macedonia in **verse 2**.¹⁰

⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 192–3: “There have always been dedicated pastors who sacrificed in life and death for the church. It was love for the church that drove the busy Reformers Luther and Calvin to preach constantly to their flocks—not merely on Sundays, but throughout the week. Many Puritan pastors continued to preach the Word after being forbidden to do so by the authorities. They knew they risked being imprisoned (as was John Bunyan), but love for the church compelled them to take that risk. Love for the church consumed the godly nineteenth-century Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne. Ill health could not deter him from his loving service, and, consequently, he died at a young age. It was his love for the church that motivated Charles Spurgeon to speak out against the modernism that was creeping into the evangelical church of his day. During the resulting ‘Down-Grade Controversy,’ Spurgeon was sharply criticized for his stand. Some of those close to him deserted him. Yet he refused to back down, although the stress the controversy generated hastened his death... Church history is replete with examples of those who sacrificially loved the church. Yet no man has ever loved the church more than the apostle Paul.”

⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 813: “The comment that Paul sent (μεταπεμψάμενος) for the disciples, i.e., for the believers in the city, seems to suggest that Paul left Ephesus immediately after the end of the riot, perhaps seeking to preempt a legal case before the proconsul or an official complaint before the popular assembly, both possibilities which the city clerk had suggested. As the departure had already been planned (v. 21), the sudden necessity of leaving the city did not allow Paul to wait for the next regular meeting of the local believers.”

⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 416: “It was not the riot that forced him to leave, because in Acts 19:21, he had already made the decision to leave at some point and to go into specific areas. But the riot was the catalyst that set the timing for his departure.”

⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 105: “Luke notes that Paul traveled ‘through those regions’ (20:2), meaning that Paul traveled by land from Ephesus through Macedonia to get to Greece. Paul could have simply taken a ship across the Aegean Sea, but instead, he chose to travel by land so that he could visit the believers along the way. Paul utilized his travels to encourage the churches throughout the Roman Empire.”

⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 832: “Paul's comment in Rom 15:19 suggests that he traveled from Macedonia to Illyricum, the next province to the west, perhaps to test his ability to function in a Latin-speaking environment before embarking on his mission to Spain (cf. Rom 15:24, 28). In Greece (Ἐλλάς), churches existed in Athens (17:16–17, 32–34), Cenchreae (Rom 16:1; cf. Acts 18:18), and Corinth (18:1–22).”

⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 618: “Second Corinthians (from Macedonia) and Romans (from Greece) may have been written at this time (Rom. 16:1, 21–23), and the total time covered by this traveling could have been as long as a year and a half to two years.”

¹⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 417: “As he traveled through Macedonia this time, he was not evangelizing, but discipling.”

And by the way, this encouragement isn't an isolated incident. The Greek παρακαλέω shows up again and again throughout Paul's ministry. During Paul's first missionary journey, **Acts 14:22** says, "When [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel [in Derbe], they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging [παρακαλέω] them to continue in the faith." During Paul's second missionary journey, **Acts 16:40** says that in Philippi, Paul and Silas "went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged [παρακαλέω] them and departed." And now, here again on Paul's third missionary journey, Paul encourages the saints in Ephesus before he leaves town. Then he travels throughout the region of Macedonia (Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica) and he encourages them too.

What did that look like? I don't know, but probably something like this: **"Keep growing as a disciple. Don't give up! Don't be discouraged by persecution. Jesus was persecuted; you'll be persecuted too. Just trust God and press through it. God loves you. And God will sustain you."**¹¹

That's the kind of thing that Paul did. **And that's what spiritual leaders do. They encourage. They build up.** And I'm sure it was especially exciting for Paul to come back to these places where he had planted churches years before and see how much some of the individual disciples had grown over the years. You can sense some of that joy in Paul's letters like **Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.**

And here's the thing about spiritual leadership. You're not going to be a good spiritual leader if you don't encourage well. You're just not. And I would say, as a rule of thumb, your leadership needs to be 80% encouragement and 20% rebuke or criticism. Maybe more like 90/10. For every critique, for every criticism, for every harsh word, there needs to be several statements of encouragement and exhortation and uplifting your fellow believers in their pursuit of Christ.

You might say, **"Tony, that's me. I'm not a natural encourager. My spiritual gift is discouragement."** Yeah, that's not a thing.

But if you're not a natural encourager, that's okay, let me *encourage* you with something! I don't think encouragement was Paul's primary gift either. I don't think he was a natural-born encourager. Who was the "son of encouragement" in the book of **Acts**? It wasn't Paul. It was Barnabas.

"What! You want to take John Mark on another missionary journey? After he deserted us! John Mark is weak. He's a quitter." That was Paul in **Acts 15** something like eight years before **Acts 20**. But now, an older, wiser, gentler Paul... after a few more life experiences and a few beat-downs for Jesus... Paul has mastered the art of encouragement. And maybe Barnabas rubbed off on Paul after all these years.

So if Paul can master the art of encouragement, so can we. And just by way of full transparency (pastoral confession time), I'm not a natural encourager either. Nobody has ever given me the nickname "Pastor Barnabas." But I learned from other people who are good at encouragement and even gifted with it... it's a spiritual gift by the way. And I've gotten better at it. I've got a ways to go. But I'm better. And I want to learn from those people who are good at it, because that's what spiritual leaders do. They build up by encouragement!

Write this down as #2. Spiritual leaders build up the church. They also mentor younger leaders.
Let me say it this way:

2) They **pass** the torch (Acts 20:3-6)

Look at **verse 3** with me.

³ There [in Greece... probably Corinth] he spent three months,¹² and when a plot was made against him¹³ by the Jews as he was about¹⁴ to set sail for Syria,¹⁵ he decided to return through Macedonia.¹⁶

¹¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 820: "Luke's report of Paul's final visits to churches in the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia emphasizes the importance of encouragement that invigorates and comforts believers, of exhortation that warns and advises Christian leaders, of pastoral ministries that support and safeguard believers, and of exemplary behavior that motivates believers. The narrative highlights again the importance of teamwork, of flexibility in carrying out one's plans, and of the significance of the will of God in view of the possibility and the reality of suffering."

¹² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 832: "The three months that Paul spent in 'Greece,' i.e., in Achaia, is to be connected with his extended stay in Corinth over the winter (of AD 56–57), when travel was avoided and navigation on the Mediterranean was closed. According to Rom 16:23, Gaius was his host in Corinth, where he wrote the letter to the Christians in Rome on the eve of his departure for

So Paul goes to Macedonia and then to Greece and then back to Macedonia.¹⁷ These are all places he's been before, and there are churches in all the places he travels.

But Paul doesn't just raise up churches. Look at verse 4.

⁴ *Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus,¹⁸ accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus¹⁹ and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus²⁰ and Trophimus.²¹* ⁵ *These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas,²²* ⁶ *but we sailed away from Philippi²³ after the days of Unleavened Bread,²⁴ and in five days we came to them at Troas,²⁵ where we stayed for seven days.²⁶*

Jerusalem (Rom 15:25) and where he finalized the arrangements for the collection that he put together for the church in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor 16:3)—details and activities that Luke does not mention (see on 19:21; 21:18; 24:17).¹⁷

¹³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 200: “They had not forgotten the shocking conversions of the synagogue leaders Crispus (18:8) and Sosthenes (18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1) or their humiliating defeat before the proconsul Gallio (18:12–17). Luke does not record the details of this plot, but Paul would have been an easy target for murder on a small ship—especially one crowded with Jewish pilgrims... That delay and detour cost Paul his opportunity to be in Jerusalem for Passover; all he could hope for now was to arrive in time for Pentecost, fifty days after Passover (20:16).”

¹⁴ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “Paul does not tempt God; he slips away from present danger. Because he observed that his trip to Syria was not safe, he turned back to Macedonia.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 276.

¹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 416: “Acts 20:3b–4 should be viewed in light of this collection for Jerusalem. This applies to both Paul’s change in travel plans (v. 3b) and the list of his traveling companions (v. 4). He had already experienced opposition from the Corinthian Jews (18:6, 12–16), but the danger on the open sea is even better explained if Paul had a considerable amount of money with him.”

¹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 617: “Second Corinthians 1–9 tell us that Titus earlier made a journey to Greece and Corinth, probably with the no-longer-extant ‘epistle of tears,’ to confront the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:4). Paul hoped to meet Titus at Troas. Titus’s delay appears to cause Paul to move on, and he finally meets Titus in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12–13). Titus has news about Corinth (2 Cor. 2:5–11; 7:5–13). Paul continues to gather the collection for Jerusalem as he travels (Rom. 15:25–26; 2 Cor. 8:16–24), something Luke does not mention here but does so in 24:17. It is not clear why Luke does not mention the collection here, and all answers to this question are arguments from silence (correctly, Polhill 1992: 417). What Luke is indicating is that Paul has his own journey of divine destiny to Jerusalem and then to Rome, as Jesus had in Luke 9–19, when he went to Jerusalem.”

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 414–5: “The account can be supplemented considerably from 2 Cor 1–7, where Paul discussed the events of the same period. There had been considerable tension with the Corinthian church during the final portion of Paul’s Ephesian ministry. Paul seems to have written a rather confrontive letter to that congregation during that period. He described the letter as ‘painful’ and written ‘with many tears’ (2 Cor 2:3f.).”

¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 622: “Pyrrhus is omitted in some MSS (Byz, Syriac), but it is hard to explain its presence in so much of the textual tradition if it originally had been absent. Its omission is probably a copyist’s error.”

¹⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 833: “Aristarchus (Ἀρίσταρχος), who had been arrested in Ephesus (19:29), is also mentioned in 27:2 (accompanying Paul on his journey as prisoner from Caesarea to Rome), in Col 4:10 (as Paul’s fellow prisoner) and in Phlm 24 (as Paul’s coworker).”

²⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 618: “Tychicus is noted in several NT passages (Eph. 6:21–22; Col. 4:7–8; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12).”

²¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 416: “The list in v. 4 would indicate that there was representation from each of the major areas where Paul had established churches. Sopater, Aristarchus, and Secundus came from the Macedonian churches. Gaius and Timothy represented the churches of southern Galatia. Tychicus and Trophimus were the delegates from the churches of Asia.”

²² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 416: “It is not at all clear from v. 5 whether this whole company of delegates traveled on to Troas ahead of Paul. ‘These men’ possibly refers only to the Asians Tychicus and Trophimus, who went ahead to their native province to seek a ship for the company to travel to Palestine.”

²³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 834: “It is unclear why they sailed to Troas rather than to Ephesus; time may have been a factor (cf. v. 16). Paul and several companions traveled overland from Corinth to Philippi, a journey of about 450 miles (730 km.), which took about five weeks.”

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 619: “There Paul observes the Feast of Unleavened Bread as he continues to keep Jewish feasts. The season here is the spring, and there are seven weeks remaining until the arrival in Jerusalem in 21:17 (note also 20:16, which places the arrival by Pentecost).”

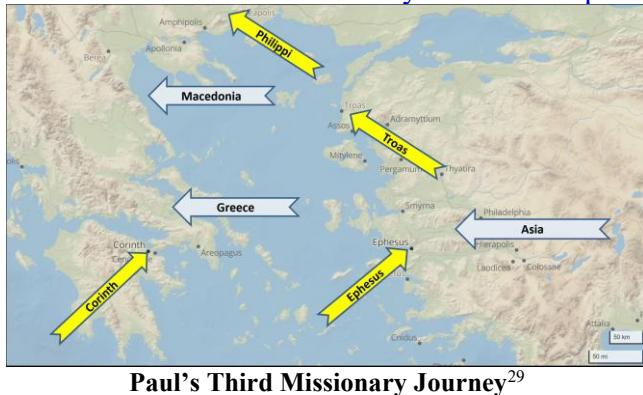
²⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 834: “Since the city controlled the trade with the northern Aegean regions due to its geographical location, [Troas] quickly became one of the most important centers of trade in the Mediterranean world, with perhaps 50,000 inhabitants. There were personal connections in the first century between Alexandria Troas and several Roman colonies in Macedonia, including Philippi.” Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 619: “They are in Troas for a week. This site is located along the rugged eastern Aegean coast about 150 miles north and slightly west of Ephesus.”

²⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 834: “Given Paul’s hurry to reach Jerusalem (cf. v. 16), the fact that Paul and his associates spent seven days in Troas appears to be due to the schedule of the ship that Paul must board for his eastward journey to Syria, rather than to the ‘open door’ that Paul had (presumably on an earlier occasion) in Troas (2 Cor 2:12–13).”

John Calvin said that this is a passage worthy of great *meditation*, but not lengthy *exposition*.²⁷ I'm going to take his advice on that. We're not going to spend a lot of time on **Acts 20:3–6**.

But let me just point out one very important lesson from these verses. Paul traveled to a lot of places, met a lot of people, and made a lot of friends. And one of the most important things that Paul did in addition to planting churches and preaching the gospel was mentoring young leaders. Luke mentions seven of those leaders here. And amazingly he doesn't even mention Titus, who we know from other NT passages was instrumental for Paul at this time too.²⁸

Now **verse 3** says that Paul spent three months in Greece. And then it says that while he was there the Jews plotted to kill him... again. So Paul adjusts his travel plans and backtracks to Macedonia where he just previously encouraged all of the churches there. Let me show you on the map where Paul goes in **Acts 20**.



Paul's Third Missionary Journey²⁹

He leaves Ephesus after the “uproar” and travels to Macedonia and then to Greece (like I said, this probably means Corinth). He spends three months in Greece, and after there's a threat to his life he comes back through Macedonia by land to Philippi and then to Troas. And **verse 6** says he spent seven days in Troas. That's where Paul preaches his long, long sermon. More on that in a moment.

Now we know that Paul is trying to get down to Jerusalem. He said that in **Acts 19:21**, even before the riot in Ephesus. But leaving from Ephesus he takes this increasingly circuitous route back to Jerusalem. First, he goes west and then he comes back east. Why does he do that? If he's trying to get to Jerusalem, why doesn't he just go straight east from Ephesus to Jerusalem? Well there's a reason why, which I'll show you in just a little bit.

But first let's look at what's packaged with this extensive travelogue. It's more than just a travelogue.³⁰ Luke lists Paul's entourage. Paul's got a posse of seven men that he's travelling with: **1) Sopater, 2) Aristarchus, 3) Secundus, 4) Gaius, 5) Timothy, 6) Tychicus, and 7) Trophimus**. Now let me say two things about these men, besides the fact that they all have really cool names.

1) They are from various places throughout the Roman Empire where Paul has planted churches. Sopater is from Berea. Aristarchus and Secundus are from Thessalonica. Timothy and Gaius are from Galatia. Tychicus and Trophimus are from Asia, probably Ephesus.

Also you can add Luke to this list, because in **verse 6**, he says “we.”³¹ Did everyone catch that? Luke is back traveling with Paul. It's interesting that Luke used “we” in **Acts** until they came to Philippi. Now they're

²⁷ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 233.

²⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 617: “Luke never mentions Titus in *Acts*.”

²⁹ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), December 12, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

³⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 106–7: “The mention of seemingly minor details like times and locations may seem tedious to the reader. These destinations and timestamps, however, bolster the historicity of the Scriptures. Luke does the work of a fine historian as he laces his narrative together with the geographic progression of Paul's mission.”

³¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 418: “[Luke] would stay with him all the way to the end of the book of *Acts*, all the way to Rome.”

back in Philippi and the “we” picks up again. Apparently, Luke was ministering in Philippi, leading the church there for all these years while Paul has been travelling. And now he rejoins Paul on his way to Jerusalem.

By the way, I don’t know what happened to Silas. He started Paul’s second missionary journey with him, but somewhere along the way he just disappeared. Probably he’s in Corinth or Ephesus helping the church. Here’s the point. Paul not only gives his best people to the church, he also mentors and trains up young people for future service in the church. Paul mentors young leaders.

2) And here’s the second thing I want to say about these seven men. Paul has planted all of these churches in the last ten years or so. So these men are, at the most, ten-year Christians. Probably some of them are even younger in their faith than that. And these men are probably young in age (like Timothy). And they are certainly young in their faith (again like Timothy). And Paul is raising up a new group of young disciples to lead the church after he’s gone.

Why’s he doing that? Because spiritual leaders mentor younger leaders. They pass the torch. Here’s my encouragement to you, church. Go find someone younger in the faith than you and mentor them!

You might say, “Pastor Tony, I’m twenty years old. Who am I going to mentor that’s younger than me?” Well, here’s a suggestion. There’s an army of up-and-coming Jesus followers in children’s ministry. And they need mentoring. Some of you are already invested in that work of discipleship. Praise God for that! Let me *encourage* you (see what I did there?) to keep doing that.

For those of you who are “senior saints” in our fellowship, listen up now! If you’ve got two or three or four decades of walking with the Lord under your belt, and more than a little grey in your hair, hear me on this—who are you spiritually mentoring? Who’s your spiritual understudy? Who are you training up to take over for you someday? You should have somebody. Replicate yourself!

In fact, why not have multiple people that you are raising up? Paul did. And there was a sense of urgency with Paul. I’m sure he was thinking, “Every time I travel to a city, they want to kill me. I’ve got one foot in the grave *constantly*. I better start passing the torch on to some younger leaders.”

Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”³² So here’s the question: what are you doing to protect and hand over the truths of the faith to the next generation of spiritual leaders?

Write this down as #3. Here’s another thing that spiritual leaders do.

3) They **feed** the sheep (Acts 20:7)

Look at verse 7.

⁷ On the first day of the week,

By the way, the first day of the week is Sunday. By this time, the church had established Sunday as the day of worship, not Saturday.³³ Sunday is, of course, the day of Jesus’s resurrection. And the church has been gathering and worshipping on Sunday ever since (see Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10).³⁴

³² Spoken on March 30, 1961, to the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. Quoted in the article by Ronnie Floyd entitled, “Freedom is never more than one generation from extinction,” 01-20-16: <https://www.brnow.org/opinions/voices-opinion/Freedom-is-never-more-than-one-generation-from-ext/>

³³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 418: “Christians may have continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath as well, but eventually the Lord’s resurrection day became the sole day of worship for Christians.” MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 202: “Despite the claims of some, Christians are not required to observe the Sabbath, as the following considerations reveal... First, although a day of rest and worship is demonstrated by God in the creation, the Saturday Sabbath was given to Israel as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 31:16–17; Ezek. 20:12; Neh. 9:14). Since Christians are under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6ff.; Heb. 8), they are not required to observe the sign associated with the Mosaic Covenant... Second, there is no command in the New Testament for Christians to observe the Sabbath... Third, even during the Mosaic economy, the Old Testament neither commanded the Gentile nations to observe the Sabbath nor condemned them for failing to do so. That offers further proof that the Sabbath was given to Israel only... Fourth, there is no record in the Bible of anyone’s observing the Sabbath before the time of Moses. Similarly, the first command to keep the Sabbath appears in the law given to Moses at Sinai (Ex. 20:8)... Fifth, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) did not impose Sabbath-keeping on the Gentile believers... Sixth, the apostle Paul warned the Gentiles about many different sins in his epistles but never about breaking the

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together³⁵ to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech [λόγος (*logos*)] until midnight.³⁶

Paul would tell Timothy at the end of his life, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage (παρακαλέω) with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Tim 4:1–2). And just so you know, Paul wasn’t a hypocrite. He wasn’t telling Timothy to do something he wasn’t willing to do. Paul tells Timothy to do the very thing he himself did throughout his ministry.

Case in point, Paul uses his last opportunity in Troas, on a Sunday, the final night of his ministry within that church, to preach God’s Word. And he preached all night. He just couldn’t stop.

Now let me just paint this picture for you a little more clearly. Verse 7 says that they were gathered on the first day of the week. So, this is Sunday. This is when the church gathers. This isn’t Paul persuading the Jews on Saturday in the synagogue. This isn’t Paul preaching Christ to the pagan Gentiles in the marketplace on another day of the week. This is church. In fact, they’re breaking bread together, which is a reference to the ordinance of communion.

And notice too that the evangelism verbs from Acts aren’t used here—*persuading* or *proclaiming*. Paul is simply “talking” with them. He’s literally “dialoguing” with them about the Word. So probably they had some questions and Paul, trying to be as thorough as possible, is answering all their questions. And he is attempting to impart everything he can to them because this is (probably!) the last time that he’s going to see them.

And verse 7 says this: “[Paul] prolonged his speech until midnight.” Literally, Paul prolonged “the Word” (the λόγος [*logos*]) until midnight. **By the way, let me just say this: a pastor needs to be able to both preach and teach. He needs to be able to proclaim the gospel to believers and unbelievers both. And he needs to be able to explain the Scriptures. Both of those are modeled for us by Paul.**

So here’s what I think happened. Paul’s like, “I’ve got one last chance to teach the Word to these believers. I’ll probably never be in Troas again.”³⁷ So Paul pulls out his OT scrolls from Genesis to Malachi, along with his other writings, and he teaches and he teaches and he teaches and he teaches all the way till midnight. **His audience might turn into pumpkins at midnight, but Paul’s going to keep preaching.**

And remember now, Luke was there! Look at the “we” statement in verse 7. Luke was there, and as he describes what happened, you get the sense that Luke was shocked by how long Paul kept teaching. And Paul “prolonged his speech till midnight!” **“Really, Paul, really? Can we wrap this up? Can you land this plane please so we can get some sleep? We’ve got a big trip tomorrow.”**³⁸

Sabbath... Seventh, Colossians 2:16–17 describes the Sabbath as a shadow of Christ; the shadow is no longer binding on us since the substance (Christ) has come... Eighth, in Galatians 4:10–11, Paul rebukes the Galatians for thinking that God expected them to observe special days, such as the Sabbath... Ninth, Romans 14:5 declares observing the Sabbath to be a matter of personal preference among converted Jews. It was to be tolerated until they became more mature in the understanding of their Christian liberty. Therefore it could not be something God requires believers to do... Tenth, the book of Acts and the subsequent writings of the early church Fathers make clear that the church from earliest times met for worship on Sunday.”

³⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 418: “We are given a glimpse into the main elements of an early Christian worship service. It was observed on the first day of the week and consisted of the breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper) and preaching. That the Lord’s Supper was accompanied by a larger fellowship meal may be indicated by the reference to their ‘eating’ in v. 11 (cf. 1 Cor 11:20f.).”

³⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 419: “*Synēgmenōn*, shows that this was a formal meeting. The verb is used of the meeting of the disciples in Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6, 30; 20:8; and 1 Cor. 5:4. It is the same word used as a noun in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and Hebrews 10:25, where believers are commanded ‘not to forsake the assembling together.’”

³⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 621: “Paul spends every last minute he can with them.”

³⁷ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 195: “Almost everywhere he went he had faced violent persecution. He believed that he would not be coming back, that he would never again see the churches of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia that had become so dear to him (cf. 20:25). (Paul may have visited some of them again after his release from his first Roman imprisonment. However he could not have foreseen that possibility at this time.)”

³⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 835: “Paul had recently written a long letter to the Christians in Rome as a summary of the gospel that he had preached and defended since his conversion; it is not implausible to think that in this long meeting of the congregation, which lasted past midnight, Paul explained the gospel and the life of believers in Jesus along the same lines.”

Look what else Luke writes in verse 8.

⁸There were many lamps³⁹ in the upper room where we were gathered.

Now lamps in the first century were open flames or even torches. And what happens when you have open flames in a room? They burn up the oxygen. And when oxygen is depleted in a room, people get sleepy.⁴⁰ That's not an unimportant observation in verse 8. Luke's setting you up for verse 9.

⁸There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.

⁹And a young man named Eutychus [Little Lucky!], sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer.

“You’ve got to be kidding me, Paul. Wrap it up already!”

And being overcome⁴¹ by sleep,

Eutychus was the first, but not the last person to fall asleep in church.⁴² The Greek indicates here that Eutychus was trying to fight this. Eutychus—bless his heart—was *trying* to pay attention. But he was overcome!

Paul was really quite fascinating when he taught the Scriptures. I would’ve loved to have been there that night when he was teaching.⁴³ And probably there were a group of people in Troas who were riveted hour after hour as Paul was teaching.

But you know how it is—a long week of hard work! Big dinner that evening! It’s way past this kid’s bedtime. And hour after hour after hour, Paul keeps teaching! **John Newton, the great preacher and hymnwriter from the eighteenth century, the author of “Amazing Grace” said once, “When weariness begins, edification ends.”**⁴⁴

And being overcome by sleep, [Eutychus] fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

That’s horrifying! **“How dead was he, Pastor Tony?”** He was dead! He wasn’t half-dead! He wasn’t knocked unconscious. He must have fell backwards three stories right on his head. And he is not alive after hitting the ground. Luke’s a doctor. He should know. This kid’s life is over!

Now let’s just set aside the humor of this for a moment, since we know the outcome. Put yourself in the shoes of these disciples. How horrifying would this be for this church!⁴⁵ I mean this kid is probably about twelve years old.⁴⁶ His parents were probably in that room with him. And now he’s lying on the ground, dead. Imagine the shrieks of horror. Imagine the wailing that would have ensued. Imagine the grief and heartbreak that would instantly hit this church as they saw that boy’s lifeless, motionless body on the ground.

³⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 204: “He may have mentioned the lamps to show that the church had nothing to hide from its pagan neighbors. More likely, however, Luke mentions the lamps to help explain why Eutychus fell asleep. The many oil-burning lamps would have added fumes and smoke to the stuffy atmosphere in the room.”

⁴⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 418: “One can sympathize with the lad. A warm spring evening, a room filled with torches burning up the oxygen supply, a long-winded preacher going into the wee hours of the morning and probably long past the lad’s normal bedtime—all these factors conspired against the youth. He probably had taken refuge in the window to catch a breath of fresh air, fighting his drowsiness.” Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 107: “A full belly, a warm room, and a long-winded talk spell potential disaster for a listener whose seat of choice is an open window on the third story of a building.”

⁴¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 620: “The shift from the present participle ‘falling asleep’ (καταφερόμενος, *katapheromenos*) to the aorist ‘was overcome’ (κατενεχθείς, *katenechtheis*) because of sleep vividly shows the movement to the apparent tragedy.” Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 836: “Eutychus sank into a ‘deep sleep’ (ὕπνος βαθύς), with the passive tense of the verb ‘sank’ (καταφερόμενος) suggesting that a force stronger than his will pulled him down into a profound slumber, a fact that is mentioned twice.”

⁴² Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 32: “I have great sympathy for those who have trouble staying awake in church. Some of us work such trying schedules that when we sit down, it is the first time we have relaxed all week. Others are sometimes victims of medication. Sometimes it is just so warm . . . The truth is, some of the best saints have fallen asleep in church. Eutychus was perhaps an enthusiastic new Christian who, though he was tired, would not miss church for anything. His spirit was willing, but his body was sleepy.”

⁴³ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 32: “I feel sorry for Eutychus, first, because he fell asleep on the Apostle Paul, second, because his sleepiness had such unhappy results, and, third, because Luke was there to record the whole thing! This is the first record ever of someone falling asleep in church. There have been thousands of successors, but Eutychus is the one everyone remembers.”

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 32.

⁴⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 418: “This, of course, was not a laughing matter. The fall evidently killed him. It could only be viewed with humor retrospectively in light of its happy ending because through the apostle, God turned tragedy into joy.”

⁴⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 620: “As a lad or young man (παῖς, *pais*, v. 12), he would likely be between eight and fourteen years old.”

But their grief and horror didn't last long. Look at **verse 10**.

¹⁰ But Paul went down and bent over him,

Literally “he fell on him.” Just like Elijah and Elisha in the OT when they stretched themselves over the children to raise them from the dead (**1 Kgs 17:17–22; 2 Kgs 4:30–37**).

and taking [Eutychus] in his arms, [Paul] said, “Do not be alarmed, ⁴⁷ for his life is in him.”⁴⁸

Can you imagine the relief that the church felt in that moment? Can you imagine the radical shift in emotion from heart-rending grief to uncontrollable joy as they realized that Paul had just brought this kid back to life?⁴⁹

¹¹ And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while

Paul raised the kid from the dead and then went right back to work!⁵⁰

he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak,⁵¹ and so departed.⁵²

Now watch this. This is the key phrase to understanding this passage. Look at **verse 12**.

¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little⁵³ comforted.

Write this down as #4. Here's a fourth thing that spiritual leaders do.

4) They **comfort** the distraught (20:8–12)

Now again, why is this passage in the Bible? What are Luke and the Holy Spirit trying to teach us with Paul and this revivification of Eutychus?⁵⁴

Some smart-alecky Bible interpreter from the congregation might say, “That’s easy Pastor Tony. God recorded this passage in Scripture to encourage pastors to not preach long sermons.”

To which a pastor might respond, “No, I think he wrote this to remind the congregation to not fall asleep while the pastor’s preaching! Otherwise, it could be deadly!”⁵⁵

⁴⁷ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 204: “Paul commanded them to stop being troubled; that is, to stop the shock, sorrow, and wailing that must have begun. Troubled is from *thorubeō*, the verb form of the word ‘uproar’ in verse 1.”

⁴⁸ JOHN CALVIN: “We must observe that the chief cause of Paul’s concern was that this sad event might not shake the faith of the godly and trouble their minds.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 279.

⁴⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 836: “The resuscitation of Eutychus places Paul in the line of the prophets from the Old Testament to Jesus and to Peter, demonstrating that the life—giving power of God (cf. Rom 4:17) was present in Paul’s ministry in similar ways.”

⁵⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 204: “Given the dramatic confirmation of his apostolic authority they had just witnessed, Paul no doubt had their undivided attention.”

⁵¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 420: “Paul now went back up to the third floor and joined in the breaking of bread (communion) and the eating of the *agape* meal. Then he preached another sermon. The second sermon was even longer than the first; it went on from midnight *even till break of day*.”

⁵² MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 205: “Paul’s selfless love for the church is notably clear. He was available to minister for an entire night and through a twenty-mile walk the next morning. No sacrifice was too great for the apostle to make for the building up of the saints. He was tirelessly available to his beloved people.”

⁵³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 620: “Luke again uses litotes, saying that they are ‘not a little comforted.’”

⁵⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 418: “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 Eutychus’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.” JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “Paul resurrected this boy from death, so that by this miracle he might show that the preaching of the gospel is not the voice of death but rather of life, not of destruction but rather of salvation; and that the gospel leads no one to destruction other than those who scorn it, hear and treat it inattentively.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 279.

⁵⁵ For an example of this hermeneutic and a negative assessment of Eutychus, see the comments by Arator in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 246. Similarly JOHANNES BRENZ writes, “Because he was overcome by sleep, he fell from the third story and was lifted up dead. Those who often sleep during the delivery of divine sermons should keep this example in mind. Because this young man so carelessly and so lazily paid attention to Paul’s sermon that he fell asleep, by God’s just judgment he collapsed and died... Therefore, we must stay awake during divine sermons and diligently pay attention, lest we be overcome by sleep and earn death by our sleep.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 278. JOHN CALVIN disagrees, “I see no reason why certain commentators condemn the young man’s sleepiness so strongly and sharply by saying that he was punished for his lethargy with death. For what is strange about his struggling with sleep at the dead of night and finally succumbing? One may gather from the fact that he was attacked and overpowered by sleep against his will and contrary to his expectation, that he had not settled down to rest. It would have been a sign of laziness to try to get a suitable place for sleeping. But what else is his being overwhelmed by sleep, when sitting in the window, but

To which a congregant might respond, “Well if we die during your sermon, Pastor Tony, then it’s your job as the teacher to bring us back to life.”

To which, a pastor might respond by saying, “Well if I raise you from the dead, then you have to come back and listen to the rest of my sermon.”

But I don’t think that’s the main focus of this passage or the main takeaway for us. The miracle happened, and Luke, as a faithful historian recorded it for us. But the miracle pointed to something greater than the miracle. It was a demonstration of God’s love for the congregation, and Paul’s love for the church. And verse 12 brings this home.

¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

By the way, the word “comforted” here is a passive form of the Greek παρακαλέω. It’s a remarkable statement that bookends what Paul does at the beginning of this chapter with what he does here in verse 12. At the beginning of the chapter, he *encourages* the church verbally. And here in verse 12, the church is *encouraged* by Paul’s miracle with Eutychus.

Now some people might raise an objection here and say, “Pastor Tony, I want to be a spiritual leader. I really do. I want to comfort those who are distraught. But I can’t raise people from the dead. I can’t replicate what Paul does here.”

And to that, I would respond, “I can’t either. I agree! And I’m not so sure we’re supposed to replicate what Paul does here... not exactly.”⁵⁶

But here’s the question: how can you comfort God’s people like Paul does here? How can you use the gifts and resources that God has given you as part of the church to comfort those who are distraught.

You might say, “I can’t raise the dead.” Okay, fine. But can you comfort someone who is dealing with a death in the family? Can you pray over someone who is sick? Can you sympathize with someone who is brokenhearted? Can you bring a meal to someone who is hospitalized or grieving over the death of a loved one?

Many of you have done that over the years here in our church. And I’m so thankful for the way in which our deacons have helped orchestrate a “meals ministry” here at Messiah. That’s a wonderful medium of comfort and mercy for those who are distraught.

One of the things we have to wrestle with in the book of Acts is what’s *prescriptive* and what’s *descriptive* in these passages. Right? We’ve talked about that before. And I’ve said things like, “Don’t teach the apostles’ experience, instead experience the apostles’ teaching.” And I think that’s a helpful reminder for how to interpret some of these difficult passages.

But if all you ever conclude from this story in Acts 20 is that Paul raised some kid from the dead! If all you ever conclude is that this is a historical fact... “It happened; just make note of it” ... I think you’ve missed something.

And here’s something that might be helpful to you when you think about miracles like this. Signs and miracles are never ends in themselves. They are a means to an end. Sometimes the end is advancing the gospel. Sometimes the end is authenticating the gospel message. Sometimes, like here, the endgame is comforting the distraught within the church.

So remember this—don’t ever fixate on miracles as the endgame. They are a means to an end. And the end isn’t *only* accomplished by extraordinary miracles. We can comfort the church body in a

innocently yielding to natural weakness, just as if someone lost consciousness from fasting or excessive fatigue? Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 278–9.

⁵⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 108: “Too often, churches manipulate narratives like that of Acts 20 to build a ministry around healing and miracles. Paul, however, focused on the proclamation of the gospel. The word of God stood as the centerpiece of Paul’s ministry. This was not a miracle service interrupted by a word of preaching. This was preaching interrupted by a miracle. The true miracle, though, flows from the power of the gospel itself to raise spiritually dead men and women to eternal life. Though no Christian today should expect to experience what Eutychus did, every Christian will experience more than he did. One day, Christ will raise us all up from the grave, and on that day we will be brought into an eternal life.”

time of grief and heartbreak without raising the dead. And we should. Spiritual leaders do that. Spiritual leaders comfort the distraught.

Sometimes, and you've got to be careful with this, we can comfort the distraught by giving a theological perspective on death and the afterlife. We do that by reminding people that this world is not our home, and we shouldn't cling to life in this world like it's our final destination. And when Christians die, we don't have to grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13).

But like I said, you've got to be careful with that. Make sure you don't too quickly try to theologize a person's grief away. Let them grieve. Sympathize with them in that grief. "Weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). And then, after weeping, when the opportunity is there, you can reinforce biblical perspectives on death and the afterlife.

Fifthly. One last thing. Spiritual leaders build up the church, they pass the torch, they feed the sheep, they comfort the distraught, and finally...

5) They **lead** with decisiveness and conviction (Acts 20:13–16)

Look at verse 13.

¹³ But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵ And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched⁵⁷ at Samos,⁵⁸ and the day after that we went⁵⁹ to Miletus.⁶⁰ ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time⁶¹ in Asia, for he was hastening to be⁶² at Jerusalem,⁶³ if possible, on the day of Pentecost.⁶⁴

Let me summarize what's going on here as you observe the details on the map.

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 421n70: "Παρεβάλομεν in v. 15 is not altogether clear. It may indicate that they 'stopped at' Samos, but more likely it means they 'passed by' the island. The Western text adds after 'Samos' the words 'staying at Trogylillum.' This is possibly the original reading. The Trogylillum was a promontory from the mainland adjacent to the southeast side of Samos, forming a narrow passage between the mainland and the island, which was scarcely a mile wide."

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 621: "These short one-day trips from port to port are typical of ancient sea trips. They proceed carefully because of the combination of winds and rocky coasts tricky to navigate."

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 837: "The trip from Samos to Miletus was only 20 miles (35 km.), which would have taken nine hours of sailing against headwinds. Miletus was a major port south of Ephesus."

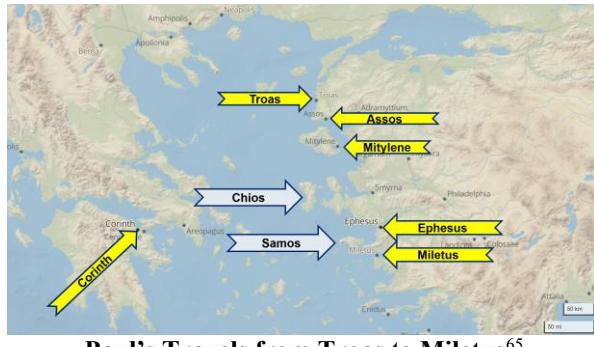
⁶⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 420–1: "They evidently put into port each night. The winds usually died during the night, and the rocky coastal area was more favorable to daytime sailing."

⁶¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 838: "Paul does not want to 'lose time' in the province of Asia; he wants to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (May 29, AD 57) and then travel to Rome, presumably in early summer, before moving to Spain in the fall of AD 57 or in the spring of AD 58."

⁶² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 838n1758: "The optative of the verb (εἴη) indicates Paul's awareness of the fact that not all plans can be carried out with certainty."

⁶³ JOHN CALVIN: "There is no doubt that Paul had strong and important reasons for hurrying to Jerusalem, not because the sacredness of the day meant such a lot to him but because foreigners were in the habit of flocking to Jerusalem from all directions for the feast days. Because he hoped that he would do some effective work in such a great multitude, he did not wish to miss the opportunity. Let us therefore realize that worship according to law did not enter into the reason for his making such great haste, but that what he had in mind was the upbuilding of the church, partly by reporting to the faithful that the kingdom of Christ had been extended, partly by winning any who were still unfamiliar with Christ, partly by repelling the calumnies of impudent people." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 279.

⁶⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 834: "Passover (the 14th day of Nisan) was celebrated in AD 57 on April 7, which left five weeks for the journey from Philippi via Troas, Miletus, Tyre, and Caesarea to Jerusalem, which Paul wants to reach in time for the Feast of Pentecost (May 29, AD 57; cf. 20:16)... The comment in v. 6 suggests that Paul celebrated the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread with the Jewish Christians of Philippi." MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 205: "The delay caused by the plot against his life at Corinth (20:3) had forced Paul to miss celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. He was still determined to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover."



Paul's Travels from Troas to Miletus⁶⁵

Luke and Paul's travel associates board a ship in Troas for Assos. Paul instead travels by land from Troas to Assos. Then Paul boards in Assos and goes to Mitylene and then the island of Chios and then the island of Samos and then to Miletus. Paul's plan is to get ultimately to Jerusalem. But he stops along the way in Miletus which is about thirty miles south of Ephesus. And Paul decides to not stop at the port in Ephesus because, according to **verse 16**, he was “hastening to be at Jerusalem” by the day of Pentecost.⁶⁶

And we see in **verse 17** that he stayed in Miletus.

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

Now if this is Paul's last journey before Jerusalem and then Rome, why doesn't Paul want to go to Ephesus for one final visit? I mean this is the place where Paul has spent more than three years of his missionary life. He's invested a lot of energy into that church. Why not visit them one last time?

Well I'll give you one very compelling reason why he doesn't go there, “**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**” Nobody wants to experience that madness again. Paul is probably trying to avoid another riot by going to the city of Ephesus.

But also, as **verse 16** tells us, Paul was hastening to be at Jerusalem before Pentecost. He couldn't just take a quick trip up to Ephesus for a day or two, he knows that a couple days could easily turn into weeks. So he decides to tell the elders to come to him at Miletus which is about a two days' journey from Ephesus. And in Miletus, Paul gives a very powerful, passionate goodbye message to these Ephesian elders.⁶⁷ We'll look at that next time.

But there's another reason why Paul is in such a hurry to get to Jerusalem. Why not spend time in Ephesus? What's the rush? Well there's a reason. And the reason is that Paul has travelled extensively in the previous year and has collected a large sum of money to bring back to the church in Jerusalem to relieve the church from the poverty and the famine that has ravaged the city. You might ask, “**How do you know that, Tony?**”

We know this from the books that Paul wrote during this time of his ministry. Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** from Ephesus. And here's what he wrote, “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem” (**1 Cor 16:1-3**).

Later Paul wrote the book of **2 Corinthians** from Macedonia where he spends two chapters on the collection of relief for the saints in Jerusalem (see **2 Cor 8-9**). And then from Corinth, Paul wrote the book of **Romans** where he says, “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

⁶⁵ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), December 12, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁶⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 109: “The churches in the region are needy, and he realizes that if he visits with them, he will be unable to make it to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Sometimes, leaders have to make strategic sacrifices in order to accomplish the mission.”

⁶⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 109: “Paul, as so often, has a strategic, Christ-centered impulse which drives his mission. Paul has intentionally disengaged himself from the direct oversight and leadership of the Ephesian church.”

For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings" (**Rom 15:25–27**).

So when you put all of these historical pieces together, you realize that Paul was urgently trying to reach Jerusalem with financial aid for the church.⁶⁸ He took this circuitous route through Macedonia and Greece and Asia to collect benevolence from all the Gentile churches, so that he could deliver them to the suffering believers in Jerusalem.

That was Paul's plan. That was Paul's conviction. And Paul was driven to accomplish that leadership agenda. And he does it. In fact, as we'll read later in **Acts 21**, Paul delivered that benevolence to the Jerusalem church at great risk to his life. It wasn't long after he reached Jerusalem that he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome in chains as a prisoner. More on that later in our series!

And as part of that decisiveness, Paul calls the elders in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus to give them some final instructions. What instructions are those? Come back next week and I'll tell you.

Let me close with this. I'm going to land this plane in about sixty seconds, so if I lost you along the way, listen up now. If the spirit of Eutychus got the best of you and you dozed off a little bit during this sermon, now's the time to wake up. I've saved the best for last, so here it is.

I feel like it's necessary to remind all of us with a sermon like this on spiritual leadership, that even the best spiritual leaders in the church make mistakes. Is that true? Good leaders make mistakes. Paul was one of the best spiritual leaders ever, and even he failed the church at times.

And let me speak to the elders and other leaders in this church. Even at your best as a spiritual leader, you're going to make mistakes and God is going to work despite your failings. Amen? That's not an admonition, that's a comfort.

Your pastor, even if he is a good spiritual leader, he's going to fail you at some point, at some level as your pastor. Your elders, and we've got great elders here at Messiah, at some point, at some level they will fail you as your leaders. As I've said before, if you're looking for the perfect church, this *ain't it*. Perfect churches don't exist.

But here's the thing. And here's what we need to remind ourselves of often. There is one Spiritual Leader who will never fail us. There is a Great High Priest who sinlessly and flawlessly leads us into God's presence. And by his blood, shed for us, we are saved. His name is Jesus. And by imitating his example as a flawless Spirit-empowered leader, we can be God-honoring, Spirit-empowered, spiritual leaders too. Look to Christ; He's our perfect example. Look to Christ.

⁶⁸ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 199: "Why was the collection so important to Paul? First, because he had a love for the saints in Jerusalem who were impoverished by persecution. Those believers also carried the burden of the believers who had been pilgrims in Jerusalem when they were saved at Pentecost and then remained and needed provision. Furthermore, the other apostles at Jerusalem had asked him to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10)... To compound the difficulty of the Jerusalem church, the land of Israel had suffered a severe famine (cf. Acts 11:28). Had it not been for the relief efforts organized by the Jewish proselyte Queen Helena of Adiabene (a region in northern Mesopotamia east of Syria), many would have perished."