

Acts 20:1–38 — Finishing Well, Feeding Well, Giving Well

After the uproar in Ephesus died down, Paul gathered the disciples, embraced them, and left for Macedonia. He wasn't running from ministry—he was moving with purpose. His heart was set on strengthening the churches and gathering a relief offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. He wanted the Gentile churches to express real, family-level love toward Jewish believers, because in Christ the body is one.

Strengthening the Saints Along the Way

Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece, encouraging the believers and staying about three months. But a Jewish plot forced him to change plans. Instead of sailing straight toward Syria, he returned through Macedonia. Several brothers traveled with him—men from different churches—likely for companionship, accountability, and protection. Luke reappears in the narrative with “we,” reminding us that ministry is often carried by a team, not a lone hero.

They sailed from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread and arrived in Troas, staying seven days.

Practical Application:

God's guidance is not always a straight line. Sometimes He protects you by redirecting you. A changed plan is not a failed plan if it keeps you in the Lord's will.

The First Day of the Week and a Midnight Message

In Troas, the believers gathered “on the first day of the week...to break bread,” and Paul spoke until midnight because he planned to leave the next day. The focus of the meeting is simple and beautiful: fellowship around the Lord's table and teaching rooted in truth.

As Paul continued speaking, a young man named Eutychus fell asleep in the window and dropped from the third story. He was taken up dead. Paul went down, embraced him, and said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.” God restored the young man, and the church was deeply comforted. Then they went back upstairs, broke bread, ate, and Paul talked until daybreak.

Practical Application:

The Lord's people are not immune to weakness, fatigue, and tragedy. But the Lord is present in the middle of it. Even when a night turns frightening, God can turn it into comfort and renewed faith.

Challenge for Believers:

Do not let spiritual life become something you “attend” while your heart drifts into drowsiness. Stay awake in the Word. Stay alert in prayer. Stay engaged in fellowship. Many falls begin with quiet spiritual sleep.

Paul Walks While the Team Sails

From Troas the group sailed toward Assos, but Paul chose to walk. It's a small detail, yet it shows a realistic spiritual rhythm: sometimes you need solitude and movement to pray, think, and prepare your heart.

They continued by ship from place to place until they arrived at Miletus. Paul chose not to stop in Ephesus because he was hurrying to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. Instead, he sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus.

Practical Application:

Some of your most important spiritual clarity comes when you slow down enough to think, pray, and listen. Make room for quiet obedience, not just busy service.

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

1) A Ministry You Can Inspect Up Close

When the elders arrived, Paul reminded them of his life among them:

"You know...what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials..."

Paul didn't only teach truth; he lived truth. He served with humility, endured suffering without quitting, and stayed tender-hearted even in conflict.

Practical Application:

The gospel is not only preached from a pulpit; it is preached through a life. People watch what we do under pressure far more than what we say when things are easy.

2) The Message: Repentance and Faith

Paul summarized his core message:

"Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Repentance is not mere regret. It is turning—turning from sin, self-rule, and excuses, and turning to God. Faith is personal trust in Jesus Christ—His cross and resurrection, His authority and mercy.

And Paul added that he was heading to Jerusalem "bound in the spirit," not knowing details, except that the Holy Spirit kept warning him that "chains and tribulations" awaited him. Yet Paul declared:

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy..."

His goal was not safety. His goal was faithfulness—finishing the race God gave him.

Challenge for Believers:

Ask yourself what you're living for. Comfort cannot be your highest aim if you want to finish well.

Decide now: I want obedience more than ease, faithfulness more than applause, Christ's approval more than man's comfort.

3) The Gospel of the Grace of God

Paul described his calling as:

"to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Grace means God acts toward sinners with undeserved mercy. God does not pretend sin is harmless—He hates sin because He loves people and knows that sin destroys. But He did not leave us trapped. Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Grace is not God ignoring sin; it is God conquering sin through Christ.

Practical Application:

Never outgrow grace. You don't graduate into self-salvation. You live by grace the way you began—humbly, gratefully, and daily.

4) “I Am Innocent of the Blood of All Men”

Paul said:

“I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare...all the counsel of God.”

He did not tailor his preaching to avoid hard truths. He warned, taught, corrected, and encouraged. He gave the whole message—sin and salvation, repentance and faith, judgment and mercy, suffering and hope.

Challenge for Believers:

Do not build a faith that only includes the parts you like. A selective Bible produces a fragile Christian. Let the Word correct you, not just comfort you.

5) The Shepherd's Charge: Feed the Flock

Paul's central instruction to the elders was unmistakable:

“Take heed...to all the flock...to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

The church is not a market, an audience, or a brand. It belongs to Jesus, and it cost Him His blood. Pastors and leaders are stewards—accountable to God to feed, guard, and care for people.

Then Paul warned them:

“After my departure savage wolves will come in among you...Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

Some wolves come from outside. Some emerge from inside. Their aim is always the same: to gather followers for themselves.

So Paul urged them to watch, reminding them that for three years he warned “night and day with tears.” And then he gave them what every church needs most:

“I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up...”

The protection of the flock is not personality, charisma, or trend. It is God and His Word.

Practical Application:

The best defense against deception is depth. A Bible-fed believer is harder to manipulate.

6) Integrity With Money and the Joy of Giving

Paul pointed to his own example:

“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold...these hands have provided for my necessities...”

He labored to avoid being a burden and to model something essential:

“You ought to support the weak.”

Then he quoted a saying of Jesus not recorded in the Gospels:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Paul tied leadership to generosity, not greed. True ministry gives. It does not use people. It serves people.

Challenge for Believers:

Guard your heart against coveting and spiritual consumerism. Ask: am I living to get, or living to give? Am I using my resources to strengthen the weak, support the gospel, and serve the body?

A Beach, Tears, and a Final Prayer

When Paul finished speaking, he knelt down and prayed with them. They wept openly, embraced him, and sorrowed most because he said they would likely not see his face again. Then they walked with him to the ship.

Practical Application:

Some goodbyes are holy. They remind us that ministry is relational, not mechanical. The gospel produces real love, real grief, and real hope.

Invitation to Non-Believers

If you are not reconciled to God, hear the heart of this chapter: the message is repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. The resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Your sin is not too intense or deep for His mercy, and your past is not too strong for His power. Turn to Him. Trust Him. Call on Him honestly, and surrender your life to Him.