

Acts 20.⁷⁻¹²

Background

This week's study marks the start of a new series entitled "*the flock's the future*": it's a series aimed at sharpening our thinking about the church – helping us to understand the better what the church is, why the church matters, how the church is built by the Lord – and how we may grow to love being a part of Christ's church!

As a resource you may find the book "*Love Your Church*" by Tony Merida helpful. It's available from the Good Book company, and if enough people are interested (let us know!) we may be able to bulk order, enabling you to purchase it for £5.60. You'll see from the Good Book Company's [website](#) that there are also a number of useful 'accessories' freely available in conjunction with the book itself.

"*Love Your Church*" is a useful 'complement' to, rather than the basis of, our series: it addresses "8 great things about being a church member", and our series will certainly cover these 8 themes over the course of the coming weeks, after a couple of introductory studies from Acts 20, of which this week's study is the first. These first initial and introductory studies centre around two *narrative* passages, the narrative serving to illustrate helpfully the church in action: they provide real, live 'snapshots' of the church, as it were, rather than a more formal exposition of the doctrine of the church. Thereafter the series will use Paul's letter to the Romans as the basis for our 'thematic' studies, as follows –

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| 1. Romans 1.1-16 | belonging |
| 2. Romans 5.1-5 (& 14.1-15.7) | welcoming |
| 3. Romans 10.1-21 | sending |
| 4. Romans 12.1-8 | serving |
| 5. Romans 12.9-21 | caring |
| 6. Romans 15.14-22 | witnessing |
| 7. Romans 15.30-16.3 | honouring |
| 8. Romans 16.3-27 | gathering |

This week's study focuses on the 'cameo' of the church at Troas which Luke provides in 6 short but striking verses: they provide a window onto the life of the early church and help define some of the key features which characterize the church.

The 7 Daily Bible Readings for the week culminate in a more concentrated look at the church in Troas, but provide (over the first 4 days) a bit of the background which you may find helpful.

Troas was right at the western end of the continent of Asia; it must have felt like the end of the road (indeed, even a 'dead end') to Paul when he arrived there on his second missionary journey after a series of frustrating preaching endeavours. It would be easy to read through Acts and view Troas as little more than a staging post on Paul's travels – failing to see that actually a church was planted there: and church life at Troas could be more than a little interesting....!

Days (5), (6) and (7) are the ones to concentrate on if you're pushed for time: it's in relation to them that I've added some questions perhaps more appropriate to the CGs.

1) Monday 20th September – growth

Read [Acts 16.1-5](#)

“.. so the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers ..” (Acts 16.5)

The book of Acts records the story of the remarkable expansion of the gospel: through numerous little ‘cameos’, Luke masterfully paints a picture of the life of Christ’s church as communities of believers came into being and grew.

Disciples. Believers. Churches. What does each of these ways of referring to Christians (another designation first used at Antioch!) highlight?

How were the churches ‘strengthened in the faith’ – and how have *you* been strengthened in the faith?

Prayer: *How wonderful are the ways you make things grow, my Lord! I yearn for such growth in the life of Your church as well as in my own walk with Yourself.*

2) Tuesday 21st September – Shepherd

Read [Acts 16.6-10](#)

“.. concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them ..” (Acts 16.10)

The Lord is very sovereign in orchestrating the work of planting and building His church and His servants must develop an alertness to the ways in which He closes some doors and opens others, to ensure His gospel is preached and His church freshly planted.

What providences can you recognize in your own life which ensured the gospel was preached to you? Give thanks for those He used!

How have you been aware of the Lord directing your paths, even through times which were perplexing (as it must have been for Paul here)?

Prayer: *O Lord, You are my Shepherd: Your ways are not our ways, but You are wise in how You lead Your people. Help me today to hear Your voice and follow where You lead*

3) Wednesday 22nd September – faith

Read [Acts 16.11-15](#)

“.. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message ..” (Acts 16.14)

The church in Philippi began in the place of prayer and with the message of the gospel. Faith comes by hearing, certainly; but it’s the Lord alone who opens the heart and creates there the response of faith. Person by person Christ’s church was being built.

Are you praying for the Lord to open the hearts of people around you?

How might you today open your home as an expression of opening your heart to the Lord?

Prayer: Thank You for Your grace in opening my heart, O Lord. Help me to see how I may serve the cause of Your gospel in all that I say and do today.

4) Thursday 23rd September – encouragement

Read [Acts 20.1-6](#)

“.. He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people ..” (Acts 20.2)

The travelling band has grown through the course of this second missionary journey (compare v.4 with [Acts 15.40-41](#)), and as such their company provided a picture in miniature of the remarkable growth of Jesus’ church in those early days.

Who ‘accompanies’ you in your service of the Lord and how do they enrich your knowledge and enjoyment of the Lord?

The ministry of ‘encouragement’ (see vv.1-2) is important: in what ways might you encourage others today?

Prayer: Waken me every morning, Sovereign Lord, to grant me a well instructed tongue that I might know the word that sustains the weary ([Isaiah 50.4](#))

5) Friday 24th September – resurrection

Read [Acts 20.6-7](#)

“.. On the first day of the week we came together to break bread ..” (Acts 20.7)

Luke gives a window onto the vibrancy of the life of the early church: they were a community of believers, committed to one another and delighting in one another as together they directed their hearts and lives to the Lord.

‘The first day of the week’ had become a weekly reminder of the resurrection of Jesus: how consciously do you live your life in the light of His resurrection?

How might you make more of your ‘coming together’ with other believers this coming Sunday?

Why is our ‘coming together’ so key a part of the believer’s life?

Many of those at Troas on that day were ‘in transit’: what might parallel that in our own church life, and how might we ensure maximum mutual benefit from the gathering of those in transit and those more permanently here?

Prayer: How good and pleasant it is, my Lord, when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity! May Your blessing fall upon Your people imparting ‘life for evermore’ ([Ps.133](#))

6) Saturday 25th September – alive

Read [Acts 20.8-10](#)

“.. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘He’s alive!’ ..” (Acts 20.10)

You never know exactly what may happen when the Lord’s people gather together on the first day of the week and direct their hearts to Him! Believers are still very flawed in their humanity – but the risen, resurrecting Lord is present in power among them!

When you gather with fellow believers on the first day of the week for worship, do you come with an expectation that God will be mightily at work?

How does Eutychus provide a good illustration of the grace of God in the gospel?

Covid has made us all the more aware of ‘health and safety’ issues! How do we get a healthy balance between being risk-averse and reliant on the Lord?

Prayer: *I thank You constantly, my Lord and Saviour, that though I once was dead, because of Your great love for me You made me alive in Christ!*

7) Sunday 26th September – comforted

Read [Acts 20.7-12](#)

“.. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted ..” (Acts 20.12)

The first day of the week. Here’s a paradigm for our own marking of this weekly reminder of the risen Lord. The believers gathered together: they spoke and shared together: they sat under apostolic teaching: and they witnessed life from the dead!

What do you learn about the early church from this brief cameo?

In what ways does this picture of the early church (a) reflect and (b) differ from the life of your fellowship?

If this was the only window you had onto the life of the church, how would you define the church?

Prayer: *You make me glad by Your deeds, Lord: I sing for joy at what Your hands have done: how great are Your works, Lord! Do such works again today!*