



## 25. 'Encouraging the saints'

Acts 20.<sup>1-12</sup>

### Background

There is often a certain 'cyclical' pattern in the Lord's way of working. You see something of that in Genesis 1, for instance, where the Lord returns on days 4-6 to the spheres of activity in which He'd already been at work on days 1-3 – building on what had already been done.

There's another instance of that same pattern in these verses where the focus on Troas takes us back to where this whole more recent sphere of ministry on the part of Paul had begun (see [Acts 16.6-10](#)). When Paul had first arrived at Troas it must have seemed like something of a 'dead-end': he'd been 'kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia', and he'd found that the door was effectively closed in his face when he tried to enter Bithynia – so that when he arrived at Troas, right at the end of the continent, it must have seemed like the end of the road.

In truth, of course, far from being a set of buffers, Troas would prove to be a launch-pad for bringing the gospel into Europe: and the experience of 'death' (Troas seeming to be a 'dead-end') followed by 'resurrection' in the eruption of new life in a whole new continent, was now replicated in the events surrounding Eutychus – the death (or certainly the seeming death) of the young man being followed by a remarkable restoration to life. 'On the first day of the week', too, of course!

There's a pattern, in other words, which we're meant to notice: a 'cyclical' pattern of death and resurrection which runs through the whole story of the extraordinary spread and expansion of the church. It's a pattern which we can recognise at a personal level, in the Lord's dealings with us: and a pattern we may recognise as well in the life of Christ's church. This is how, through the ages and across the globe, the work of the gospel has invariably grown.

There are lessons for us, therefore, both in the broad sweep of the narrative here, as also in the details of that narrative. And although it presents as little more than a brief travelogue, culminating in a rather dramatic all-night meeting, it's a passage full of helpful instruction.

Note the 'we' references, indicative of the presence of Luke, the doctor. He was part of the growing band of Gentile believers now accompanying this formerly zealous Jew! Start with '**days**' (4), (5) and (6).

## 1) Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August – surviving the storms

Read [Acts 20.1](#)

*“.. Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye ..”* (Acts 20.1)

The early years of the Ephesian church had been turbulent! The riot brought many underlying tensions to a head, and the outcome seems to have secured the future for the church there. Saplings that survive the early storms are likely to keep on growing.

After you committed yourself to the Lord Jesus, did you experience ‘storms’ designed to keep your faith from taking root?

Paul was careful to maintain the best of contact with his fellow believers: are there fellow believers with whom the Lord is prompting you to be in touch?

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Lord, for those who have seen me through the storms of life and have helped me become firmly rooted in Yourself and in Your love. Bless them today!*

## 2) Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August – bringing encouragement

Read [Acts 20.2-3](#)

*“.. speaking many words of encouragement to the people ..”* (Acts 20.2)

New believers need constant encouragement and care which Paul was eager always to give. ‘Old-timers’ like him could cope with the natural discouragement of persistent opposition. Whatever your circumstances, seek to bring encouragement to others.

Who have been the big ‘encouragers’ in your life, and in what ways have they regularly encouraged you?

To whom might you ‘speak words of encouragement’ (by whatever means) today?

**Prayer:** *When I walk through dark valleys, Lord, Your very presence with me breathes fresh courage into my heart: help me to bring such encouragement to others today.*

## 3) Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August – bonding with ‘the brothers’

Read [Acts 20.4](#)

*“.. he was accompanied ..”* (Acts 20.4)

The growing band of those accompanying Paul – believers from the places where the message had been preached – was a pointer to the growth of Christ church in the Gentile world, and the very cosmopolitan character of that church.

These guys were willing to put their lives on hold, and indeed to put their lives on the line (see [Acts 19.29](#)), for the Lord: how does this challenge you?

Do you view your fellow believers for the most part, as little more than mere acquaintances – or as truly brothers and sisters in Christ?

*Prayer: Thank You, O Lord, for bringing me into Your family and for giving me a family of believers to whom I belong. Help me to value them highly and love them deeply.*

#### **4) Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August – completing the circle**

Read [Acts 20.5-6](#)

*“.. these men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas ..” (Acts 20.5)*

It must have been thrilling to return to Troas, from where this whole remarkable expansion of the gospel into Europe had begun. There are times when God ‘completes the circle’ and enables us to pause and reflect on all that He has been doing with us.

Paul seems to have used an ‘advance party’ (see also [Acts 19.22](#)) much as Jesus regularly seems to have used an ‘advance party’ (see [Matt.14.22](#), [Lk.10.1](#), for instance): what do you think were the reasons for this approach?

And what lessons might it have for us?

Take time today to re-trace the Lord’s dealings with you over recent years: what have been the highlights of His working in you, for you and through you?

What have been the big surprises over these years in terms of all that the Lord has been doing in and through your life?

*Prayer: How glad I am, O Sovereign God, to know that You will carry on to completion every good work which You have begun in my life, until the day of Christ Jesus.*

#### **5) Friday 25<sup>th</sup> August – affirming priorities**

Read [Acts 20.7](#)

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

The shift from sabbath observance on the Saturday to a marking of the first day of the week was huge, itself a testimony to the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. Note the early church’s priorities: marking the day, celebrating the sacrament, preaching the Word.

The ‘Sabbath day’ is referred to as ‘a shadow of the things that were to come’ ([Col.2.16-17](#)), a pointer, that is, to Christ Himself: has the coming of Jesus done away with the need to ‘observe the Sabbath day’?

In what ways does our marking the first day of the week mirror the command to ‘observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy’ ([Deut.5.12](#)), and in what ways is it different?

Has your appetite for the ‘means of grace’ – observing the Lord’s Day, sharing in the sacrament, feeding on His Word – diminished over the past while?

How might you prevent a 'staleness' in your walk with the Lord, and by contrast, nourish a continuing delight in and hunger for Him?

*Prayer: O for a closer walk with You, my Lord, a calm and heavenly frame. Help me to see You the more clearly, love You the more dearly, and follow You the more nearly.*

## 6) Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August – portraying the gospel

Read [Acts 20.8-10](#)

".. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!' .." (Acts 20.10)

Best will in the world, people can still fall asleep during sermons – even when Paul's doing the preaching! The young man fell and was picked up dead. It's Genesis 3 re-enacted: the story of humanity. The sequel is the story of the gospel. Alive in Christ!

Do you pray that as God's people gather for worship, week by week there would be those who have 'fallen' who are wonderfully restored to life?

If you're so inclined, check out Gary Millar's book on preaching called [Saving Eutychus](#) (he's ex-Gilc): what lessons can you draw from these verses?

We would have been all over this incident with Health and Safety spectacles! How do we ensure we have the right balance between 'faith' (trusting the Lord for His safekeeping) and 'works' (taking appropriate precautions)?

How do you answer a friend who asks why miracles like this don't always happen in the case of tragic accidents?

*Prayer: How fragile as well as flawed is our human frame, O Lord! Make me ever mindful of my frailty, and in Your mercy exercise Your protecting and preserving grace.*

## 7) Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August – rejoicing in the Lord

Read [Acts 20.11-12](#)

".. (they) took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted .." (Acts 20.12)

However relieved they must have been after the remarkable break in proceedings, it was straight back to the important, 'upstairs' business – an all-night celebration of the sacrament of Christ's death, the preaching of His Word, the fellowship of the saints.

Is it the Lord Himself in whom you chiefly delight – or the things He does for you?

In what ways may you be able today to ensure that your fellow believers go home 'comforted'?

*Prayer: Come among Your people today, O Lord, in resurrecting power. May Your Name be glorified, may Your kingdom be extended, may Your people be comforted.*