

**The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.**

**1<sup>st</sup> Century Christian Worship**  
**Acts 20:1-12**

**Intro:** Ch19 records the challenges and victories that Paul and the Christian church faced in the city of Ephesus. There was plenty of opposition but there was also quite a bit of success, through the teaching of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. As we move into ch20, we're not just starting a new chapter; we're actually entering into the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final section of the Book of Acts. Starting in ch20, there is a noticeable shift in Paul's ministry. Up to this point in the Book, Paul has been primarily engaged in pioneer work, carrying the gospel to regions that had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Paul has been travelling into these new areas and planting strong Christian churches. From now on, Paul will focus his energies on visiting the churches he has established and giving them some further teaching and encouragement. He doesn't realize that this will be the last time he's able to do this in person.

With the shift in Paul's ministry, we also notice a shift in focus of what Luke records. In the last section, Luke focused mainly on the places Paul visited and what had occurred in those locations. Now there will be a greater emphasis on Paul's speeches. In ch20, Luke records an important farewell address that Paul delivers to the elders of the church in Ephesus. Later on, as Paul is dragged before one Roman authority figure after another, he will give impassioned defenses of himself and the Christian faith. More autobiographical data about Paul will also be provided in some of his speeches, details not mentioned before concerning his conversion or the reason for his return to Jerusalem.

The last few chapters describe Paul's imprisonment. Paul will be arrested in Jerusalem on trumped up charges and imprisoned, first in Caesarea for 2 years and then, after much foot-dragging on the part of the Roman officials there, which finally prompts Paul to appeal to the emperor, he is imprisoned for 2 more years in Rome. This was not an easy time for him. Yet during these years we also find new opportunities for Paul to be a witness. Paul was bound in chains but the gospel was not bound, and God continued to bless Paul's ministry.

**1-3a** – Even before the riot took place in Ephesus, Paul was ready for another journey (19:21). In his ministry, Paul had a lot of obstacles to face: there was the travel, the religious opposition, the spiritual warfare, the unrelenting toil that was necessary just to continue the work and then to add to all of that, Paul now had a daily, deep concern for all the churches the Lord had allowed him to establish. Paul was a man with a concerned heart and the care "for all the churches" was not only his greatest joy, it was also his heaviest burden (II Cor 11:23-28). He desired to invest more of his life, his love for Christ and his knowledge of God's Word as much as possible into each of those fellowships.

Ch20 describes Paul's final tour of the mission field. Luke starts by saying that Paul left Ephesus to go to Macedonia. He doesn't give much detail here. When we read Paul's letters, we learn that this was a time of great agony for him. His chief concern was the situation in the church at Corinth. Some time during his ministry at Ephesus, he received word of problems in the church there. His 2 letters to the church reflect the problems. There were factions existing in the church. Believers claimed to be followers of Apollos; or Peter; or Paul; while the spiritual ones claimed only to follow Christ.. There was immorality in the church. One church member was openly sleeping with his father's wife, (step-mother?). Christians were taking each other to court. Communion services were not rightly observed, and all of this was contributing to disunity in the congregation.

All these problems troubled Paul, mainly because he had already spent a lot of time in Corinth (18 mo), pouring much of his energy and wisdom into this church. After he wrote his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to them he was anxious to find out how the church was doing. Paul sent Titus to Corinth with the responsibility of dealing with the problems and reporting back to him. He was supposed to meet Paul at Troas. But when Paul left Ephesus, he arrived at Troas expecting to meet Titus there but Titus never showed. Paul says in 2 Cor 2:12-13 that he was so upset by what he imagined was happening in Corinth that he passed over into Europe, probably intending to go directly to Corinth himself. But, there in Macedonia, Titus finally arrived and informed Paul that the Corinthians had responded well to his letter and dealt with the problems. Paul was greatly comforted by the coming of Titus (2 Cor 7:13-16).

This may be why Paul continued to minister in Macedonia. It's also why he wrote 2 Corinthians. Seeing that the problems had been dealt with properly and that God was blessing the church at Corinth he felt he could leave things in the hands of the local elders. Instead of going to Corinth then, he spent the summer traveling around Macedonia. He refers to this ministry in Rom 15:19. He then spent the winter in Corinth, where he wrote the letter to the Romans in preparation for the trip he planned to make there. Luke doesn't mention Paul stopping in Troas at this time but this is just a reminder that the Book of Acts, as wonderful as it is, is not a complete accounting of all God did through His people in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. There's a lot, even in Paul's life, that is not described – not to mention many, many others.

**3b-5** – During the winter months, the seas were too rough for boats to travel. But Paul was determined to get to

Jerusalem for Passover that spring, if possible. As it turned out, he didn't make it for Passover. When he was about to leave Corinth to sail to Jerusalem, word came that the Jews of Corinth were plotting to kill him, most likely on the ship. So, rather than going by sea, Paul decided to return overland through Macedonia. This took longer than a trip by sea and delayed his timetable. However, he would be able to pass through Macedonian and visit the churches again. Later, he would make his way to Jerusalem from a different port.

Paul had 2 goals in mind as he visited the various churches. His main purpose was to encourage and strengthen the saints so they could stand true for the Lord and be effective witnesses. His second purpose was to finish taking up a collection for the needy believers in Jerusalem. A great famine, followed by poverty had come upon the saints in the Jerusalem church. It's likely that Paul hoped to use this act of kindness on the part of the Gentile churches to show the love of Christ to the struggling believers in Judea. Not only would this gift help the church in Jerusalem but this demonstration of Christ's love for the Jews by Gentiles might assist in winning other Jews to Jesus Christ.

Thus, we are told about a team of church workers who joined Paul to help handle the funds as he made his way to Jerusalem. Not a lot is said about the mission of this team but we know from Paul's letters they traveled with him through the Gentile regions to help with the collection. It wasn't that the churches didn't trust Paul. This was clearly a sizable sum of money and Paul couldn't carry it and keep it safe by himself. These Gentile believers provided assistance and protection in numbers along the way. And, as representatives of these gracious Gentile churches, they also provided a Gentile face to the gift. It would be better if the Jewish believers in Jerusalem received this gift from the hands of their Gentile brethren and not just from a very Jewish Apostle Paul.

Who are these representatives of the Gentile churches? Sopater came from the church in Berea. This was the place where the citizens were more fair minded than those in Thessalonians because they searched the Scriptures daily" to see if what Paul said was true (17:11). They were real Bible students and Sopater was one of their leaders.

Aristarchus and Secundus came from Thessalonica and the combination of names is instructive. Aristarchus relates to the English, aristocrat or aristocracy. If the name means anything in this context, it suggests that the one bearing it was from the upper levels of society. Secundus is exactly the opposite. It's a Latin word that means second or #2. Who would name their kid that? Nobody! In this society, masters didn't call their slaves by their real names but they had to call them something. So, in prosperous homes, there'd be a slave who was the head bottle washer, in charge of all the other slaves. He'd be called Primus, (#1). He would have an understudy who worked for him and actually carried out many of #1's responsibilities. He would be called Secundus.

Why does this matter? We don't know for sure if Aristarchus really was from the aristocracy or Secundus was a slave, but it's quite possible they were. If that's the case, then this great church at Thessalonica sent men who were truly representative of their church, 1 from the upper class and 1 from the slave class, because their congregation was made up of just such a wonderful mixture. If this is an accurate picture, it's a beautiful illustration of the remarkable change that had come about in ancient culture as a result of the revolutionary impact of Christianity.

Gaius represented Derbe, one of the cities of Galatia. Timothy represented Lystra. From the province of Asia there were Tychicus and Trophimus. What about Philippi? Well, if you noticed the slight change in pronoun usage in vs5, you'll see that Luke has joined Paul's ministry team again. He had been in Philippi all this time and he was chosen to represent their church in Jerusalem. It's also entirely possible that the Corinthian church asked Paul to be their representative, since he had just spent the last 3 months with them. We don't know if this was the case but it would account for what would be a serious omission.

**6-12** – After making a pass back through Macedonia, Paul sent most of his team ahead to Troas and he and Luke joins them 5 days later. Now, before Luke describes the journey of this rather large group of Gentile believers to Jerusalem, he pauses to give us a brief glimpse into a normal day of worship at the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church in Troas. This church isn't known for anything special in the NT but their worship services seem to be typical of all the Christian churches at that time. Paul was delayed in Troas 7 days. Eventually, Sunday rolled around and the Christians came together. What occurred here is an indication of the elements that should generally be present in Christians worship.

The first thing that stands out is that the believers met on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week. Jewish tradition stipulated that worship was to occur on the Sabbath, the last day of the week. This was mandated by the OT and OT believers were expected to follow it. But, in the NT, almost automatically, Christians – most of who were Jews, switched their normal day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. Why? Jesus was resurrected on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week. This was a new beginning. When Jesus rose from the dead, old things really had passed away. A new era had begun. Jewish Christians began to worship, not on the old day – the Sabbath, but on the new "Lord's Day" as they called it. This sudden and complete change was further proof of the resurrection. There are plenty others but the only thing that can account for rejecting the long held tradition of Sabbath worship for Sunday is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Another thing we can't help but notice is the amount of time that was given to teaching on this particular Lord's Day. Paul first delivered what we would call a sermon or exposition of God's Word. From the very beginning, this was the primary element of Christian worship services. Now, not everybody can (or should) preach as long as Paul did. We don't know when he started. Sunday wasn't a day off in that culture so it would have to be after the end of the normal work day, maybe 7PM or later. He was still going strong at midnight. That's a message of four or five hours.

Clearly, that doesn't happen anywhere today nor should it. People aren't trained to sit still and listen that long. That Paul had so much to say points to the importance of the gospel message for Christianity. Whenever Christians have lost that emphasis, when they start to think of worship mainly as entertainment, or whatever produces an emotional response worked up by dynamic music; when they have substituted these other elements for careful Bible exposition in sermons, the church has always been weakened and sometimes has even perished.

This is because the power of God is not in our emotions or our spiritual experiences but in the Word of God. His Word is what God has chosen to bless, and that's why it is emphasized in properly conducted Christian services. It's not the eloquence of the preacher or even his authority that blesses the congregation, but the Word of God. One theologian put it this way, "the decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching has declined" (Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> element is the observance of the Lord's Supper. In this case, Paul preached first and they had communion after. In the early church, the Lord's Supper involved a regular meal (pot luck). By sharing and eating with one another, the church enjoyed fellowship while witnessing of their oneness in Christ. Slaves would actually eat at the same table as their masters, something unheard of in that day. This meal would then be followed with an observance of the ordinance Jesus gave the disciples at the Last Supper.

The last thing Luke shares is that after Communion, Paul spoke informally with them until morning (11). The word talked in 11 is different than spoke in 7. The latter indicates formal teaching, the former – informal conversation; what we would consider fellowship. This format is natural to Christians in every culture. Wherever we go, wherever the gospel has penetrated and churches have been established, we find that Christians naturally come together to hear the Bible taught, to pray, to observe communion and enjoy fellowship with one another.

These verses also contain the story of Eutychus. I skipped over it on purpose so that I could deal with it separately. Christians probably think about Eutychus a lot, usually when they're sitting in long church service where the preacher goes on and on. Eutychus (Fortunate) not only fell asleep, he fell out of a 3<sup>rd</sup> story window he was sitting in and apparently died. We tend to chuckle over this story, mainly because we can all relate to this situation and, in the end, Eutychus was fine. But, Luke didn't include this story here to add some comic relief. There are some serious and important truths to be discerned from this event.

Having said that, I am glad this story is in the Bible because it shows that people sometimes dozed off even when the apostle Paul was preaching. I seriously doubt that Paul was boring in his delivery or that he got lost in the weeds chasing rabbits. He didn't turn people off with dull teaching. Paul taught well and deeply. But sometimes, in spite of even the best teaching, human flesh is weak. That was the case with Eutychus. Did Eutychus die? Some believe the crowd just thought he was dead but Luke was there and he was a doctor. If he says Eutychus was dead, you can believe that he was dead and this was a miraculous restoration of life. Of course, Luke also doesn't make a big deal of the event so the miracle itself may not be his primary focus.

The significance of the event may well be this. Paul wasn't ever going to see these believers again in this life so this is really a farewell scene. Also, they had observed the Lord's Supper, something they wouldn't do as a group again until they were together in heaven. Before then they would all die, though they will eventually be raised again. Maybe the story of Eutychus is a picture of our future reunion after physical death. If it is, then it's a picture we can take to heart. We're all alive now and together with each other, but death will come and with death comes a parting. If this life were all there is, that'd be the end. But it's not the end, because there is a resurrection, and we will meet again.

We also know the end of Paul's story. Luke doesn't end Acts with Paul's death but we know his life is taken from him in Rome. But even Paul's death was not the end of him. Paul had many trials and he accomplished much for the kingdom of God, but for 2000 yrs now he's been with Jesus and so have all these faithful believers from Troas. The ending is never bad for Christians. The God who has begun a good work in us will continue to perfect that work until the day of Christ. We have his Word on it! [Phil 1:6](#)

Each element of Christian worship referenced in our text is important but the one that's in the most danger of being neglected is the primary focus on preaching and teaching the Word. The current state of Western Christianity is a

direct result of such neglect. But, if God's power is closely associated with His Word; if that's what He has chosen to uphold and bless; then how often do we allow the Word of God to invade our lives? Sure, we read it, refer to it, even study it at times but how often do we allow what we learn from it to take root in our hearts and change our lives? 😊