**ACTS 20**

**The Task of Testifying**

Acts 19 ended with a “riot” that broke out in Ephesus as the new church was planted and great events were taking place there (signs and wonders, book-burning, many people coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah.) A city official calmed the crowd and Paul and his companions remained safe.

**Acts 20:1**When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for *Macedonia*. **2**He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in *Greece*, **3**where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for *Syria*, he decided to go back through *Macedonia*. **4**He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from *Berea*, Aristarchus and Secundus from *Thessalonica*, Gaius from *Derbe*, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of *Asia*. **5**These men went on ahead and waited for us at *Troas*. **6**But we sailed from Philippi after the *Festival of Unleavened Bread*, and five days later joined the others at *Troas*, where we stayed seven days.

So Paul left Ephesus and went back up and across to Macedonia to encourage the churches (Philippians, Thessalonians, Bereans) he made his way down to Greece (Corinthians) along with men from different churches he had planted. He then wanted to sail back home East to Syria (Antioch), but because he discovered a plan against him, he decided to travel back North to Macedonia and then across to the coastal town of Troas where his companions were waiting for him, but not until they celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover). This again shows the “Jewishness” of Paul and the early church. They observed the Biblical Festivals (holidays), they did not ignore or disregard them.

**Paul’s long sermon at Troas**

**7**On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, *kept on talking until midnight*. **8**There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. **9**Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as *Paul talked on and on*. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. **10**Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” **11**Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. **12**The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

Paul was speaking for such a long time that a young man named Eutychus fell asleep at a window and fell out of it and was “picked up dead”. Most scholars interpret this text as Eutychus having fell from the window and died. When Paul, who had been performing amazing threw himself on the young man and grabbed him, he came back to life. This is the second of only two times in the new Testament when someone besides Jesus was used to raise someone from the dead. *(The other was Peter with Tabitha in Acts 9). The lesson here is either, don’t fall asleep in church or, Pastors, don’t give long sermons : )*

**Paul’s Farewell to the Ephesian Elders**

**13**We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. **14**When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. **15**The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. **16**Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

Luke is speaking here about the plans of the group, and how they decided to get Paul to join them on board a ship going along the coast from port to port instead of traveling on foot. Paul was insistent however that they get to Jerusalem for Pentecost in keeping with the Biblical mandate regarding the Festival of Shavuot, even if it meant missing another chance to stopping to visit the church in nearby Ephesus. He did, however, stop in a nearby town called Miletus, and invited the elders from Ephesus to come down so he could give them a final farewell.

**17**From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. **18**When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. **19**I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. **20**You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. **21**I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

**22**“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. **23**I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

This is in stark contrast to the message he got from the Lord in Acts 18 that “no harm will come to you”. This time, the Holy Spirit told him that *“prison and hardships / chains and tribulations await you”.* In fact a prophecy comes forth in the next chapter that confirms that he will be taken prisoner if he goes back to Jerusalem*.*

Paul’s commitment and readiness to preach the gospel was being put to the test. He had already developed a large network of house churches and substantial Christian community in Galatia, Macedonia Greece and now her on the Aegean coast. It would be easy for him to change his plans and avoid going back to Jerusalem. He could continue to cultivate the churches he planted, and develop leaders in every city that he had already visited. But that was not what the Lord was compelling him to do. He was given a task to testify of the good news of the gospel throughout the far reaches of the Mediterranean, he had hoped to visit Rome and preach the gospel, in fact he hoped to even extend it all the way to Spain.

So, even though the Holy Spirit warned him, and the prophet confirms that if he went back to Jerusalem he would be captured and experience trials and hardship, he went anyway.

Why?

**24**However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the *task of testifying* to the good news of God’s grace.

His mission was to finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus had given him. Fulfilling that goal meant more to him than comfort, convenience, safety and even freedom.

Standing before him were the Elders of Ephesus. We don’t know exactly who they were, but they were people who dearly loved Paul and worked closely with him for three years. Perhaps among them were some of the “Ephesus Twelve” who when Paul first met them told him that they were baptized, but hadn’t even heard of the Holy Spirit yet. Perhaps some were those who were with him at the lecture hall of Tyrannus, maybe even some of those who burned their sorcery books when they first believed.

Regardless of what their names were, they were the Elders of the church of Ephesus and Paul was encouraging to keep watch over that beloved church because after this moment, he would never see them again.

**25**“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. **26**Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. **27**For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. **28**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. **29**I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. **30**Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. **31**So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

**32**“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. **33**I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. **34**You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. **35**In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

**36**When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. **37**They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. **38**What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.”

**Acts and US:**

**ACTS 20:24**“I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

I attended the Christian and Missionary Alliance District Conference this week. It’s an annual gathering of the leaders of the 130 or so C&MA churches in the NY-Philly metro district. It included business reports, polity updates, worship and messages from both National and local leaders.

The conference also always includes missionaries who are hard at work spreading the gospel, and planting churches in foreign countries, mostly in Europe and Asia. I was so impressed as I spoke to young couples, many with school-age Children who are committing some of the most important years of their lives, and the most vulnerable and impressionable years of their children’s lives to the mission of spreading the gospel. Most are living in very small apartments, trying to raise enough support to pay for food, shelter and clothing in very difficult economies. Some are able to raise just enough money to get to the mission field, but usually not enough to get back home.

Their commitment to spreading the gospel in foreign lands is more important to them than family security, sending their kids to the best school districts, even more important than holidays with their family or owning a nice home. I spoke with one missionary at length and he said what drives him is that he senses a clear and strong call to the mission field. That is the task that the Lord has given him and would say, like Paul;

“my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

I believe that God will raise some from our church to “go to” the mission field. Some will be local; some will be far away. Some will be short-term; others will be a lifetime of ministry.

But I also believe that ALL of us are called to the mission field “as you go” through your life. Each of us has the responsibility to bring the gospel to those who need to hear it. Who needs to hear it?

ANYONE who is not walking in a close relationship with the Lord. Those in your life who don’t yet believe are YOUR mission field. Friends, Neighbors, co-workers, even family members, (whether you get along with them or not).

Matt 28:19-20 is what we call the *great commission*. It is Jesus’ marching orders to us. It is not only for those who are entering the mission field, but also for everyone who is a follower of Jesus. It states:

**Matt 28:19-20** “**19**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In the Greek, the word “go,” is literally translated as, “being already on the go,” or “as you are going.” The idea seems to be that since we are already going somewhere, we should start making disciples as we go. Whether it’s going to work or school, going to the beach or the gym, going to a party or family event. As you go “make disciples”.

Here is where many people get a little frustrated and give up. Many of you are probably thinking “I don’t preach”, “I don’t teach the Bible”, “I don’t have the boldness to talk about the Lord”, I do my best just to get to church on most Sundays. What can I do?

There is a lot you CAN do;

* FIRST pray for power. The power of His Holy Spirit. That’s the first thing that Jesus told us in Acts when he lunched the Apostle into this incredible book.
	+ Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
* SECOND study and prepare. Just because you’re not able to articulate the gospel clearly now, doesn’t mean you never will. Study what it means to be saved. Study how to clearly explain the gospel to someone who is interested. It is not too hard to memorize a key verse or two (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10) and expound on it with your own testimony. Remember, “being a witness” is simply telling what you believe to be true. Everyone can do that.
* THIRD, be part of a team. Each one of us can invite someone to church, where they can hear the gospel. Volunteer for an outreach, or join a ministry team to help with the mission of this church.

Paul always worked with a team of people, he never tried to do it on his own (except for Athens). In the beginning of this chapter we are given the names of Paul’s companions Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus. Luke was there as well and maybe others.

He had already made strong ministry partnership connections with Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Aquilla & Priscilla and several others.

Spreading the gospel is a team effort. If you try to do it all yourself you will likely fail. Do you have a Christian family member that you can pray with and work alongside in reaching your family? How about another Christians at work that you can connect with to reach people at work? Or perhaps a Christian neighbor that you can leverage to reach your neighborhood. I’m sure you do. I believe if we really seek God together He will give us amazing ideas and opportunities to reach others. But we really have to want it. We have to recognized that none of us are exempt from the *great commission* to make disciples. Or the Lord’s command to preach the gospel and be His witnesses.

In many of the prayer meetings I attend; I hear people pray for *revival.* I do it too.

They pray that churches will be filled up again.

That the Word of God is preached and honored by people in our nation and others.

That the Holy Spirit does amazing things among believers and unbelievers alike.

But I know that “Revival” is not something that just magically pours down from the sky like a monsoon or a heavy snowstorm. It is generated within the hearts and spirits of those who are *willing* to be “revived” by the Holy Spirit within them.

David prayed:

**Psalm 51:12** “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit.”

Once we have a willing spirit to do whatever God asks of us, then we can resonate with Paul when he said; *“my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the “task of testifying” to the good news of God’s grace.”*

When we have THAT willingness, that’s when we will begin to see our churches filled, the Word of God honored and the Holy Spirit doing great things.

At the very end of Paul’s life, in a Roman prison, when he knew that he was about to be killed, he wrote these words

**2 Timothy 4:1-5  “**I give you this charge: **2**Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. **3**For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **4**They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. **5**But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, *discharge all the duties of your ministry.”*

**6**For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. **7**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8**Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Ask the Lord to help you to do your part in the “task of testifying”;

* + Preach the word;
	+ be prepared in season and out of season;
	+ do the work of an evangelist,
	+ *discharge all the duties of your ministry.”*

***If we do that, then we to will receive* the crown of righteousness,**

**which the Lord, the righteous Judge,**

**will award to each of us on that day!**