



to  
the **ENDS**  
of  
the **EARTH**

Studies in the Book of Acts

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Acts 20 | February 5, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series To the Ends of the Earth, joining the Apostle Paul as he encourages church plants throughout the ancient world.

II. Connecting with One Another

Recall a time you were encouraged by someone else. How did it impact you?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Acts 20.1-6

In verse 2, we read how Paul “travelled through that area,” most likely revisiting the churches he founded in Macedonia, including Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.

How does Luke characterize the primary activity of Paul’s ministry? What do you think he means? (discuss or think about these two questions before continuing)

Luke describes Paul’s ministry as “speaking many words of encouragement to the people.” The word used to describe Paul’s activity, *parakaleo*, has a wide range of meaning – it could refer to an appeal, an exhortation, an encouragement, an offer of comfort or a consolation.

When have you experienced a Christian community *parakaleoing* in these ways?

What was the result of receiving such encouragement?

b. John Stott writes that *parakaleo* is “a vital ministry in establishing Christian disciples, and the principal means of its exercise is, literally, ‘much word.’ Nothing encourages and strengthens the people of God like the Word of God.”

Where has this been the case in your own spiritual journey?

How has God’s Word encouraged and strengthened you? What particular verses or passages have impacted your spiritual growth?

c. In all likelihood, Paul’s three-month stay in Greece was at the city of Corinth. Since his first year and a half long stay (see Acts 18.1-11), he had written the Corinthians four letters and visited one other time (the “painful visit” referenced in 2nd Corinthians 2.1). While likely meeting with Corinthian church leaders to discuss doctrine and ethics, Paul also wrote the Letter to the Romans while in Greece (see Romans 15.17-33).

Note, in particular, verse 3: “some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria,” which is central to future developments in Paul’s story. Note also that after revealing those with Paul, Luke resumes “we/us” language in verse 5.

Have you ever reconnected with an old friend? How did that impact your life?

d. Read Acts 20.7-12

These verses give us a glimpse into the “worship schedule” of the earliest followers of Jesus. Scholar F.F. Bruce writes that Luke’s reference to “the first day of the week is the earliest unambiguous evidence we have for the Christian practice of gathering together for worship on that day.”

What elements of their “worship schedule” do we continue today? (see Luke 22.20, 24.30-35, and Acts 2.42-47 for precedents, and 1st Kings 17.19 and 2nd Kings 4.32-33 for similar miraculous healings in the Hebrew Scriptures)

Is Luke being descriptive or prescriptive? In other words, should we only worship in the third floor of a house, in the evening, with oil lamps, and commit to inordinately long sermons? Or, should we omit prayers, hymns or Scripture readings, since those aren’t mentioned?!

e. While Sunday has historically been a day off in Western culture, it was a workday during this early season of the church’s existence. As such, Christians gathered together in the early morning or at night.

In light of these challenges, why do you think these earliest disciples worshipped together on Sunday instead of Saturday – like in the synagogue?

f. In the ancient Mediterranean world, evening meetings (like this one!) were highly suspect, often associated with political conspiracy, sexual immorality, and infant sacrifice (which, it was assumed, included consuming the blood of those ritually killed). This charge was leveled against the early church, especially in reference to Communion.

How does Luke’s account in Acts 20 counter these charges against Christians? (note especially verse 10)

g. Read Acts 20.13-35

This is the only speech in Acts that was addressed to a Christian audience – all others are evangelistic sermons or legal defenses. The leaders in Ephesus are referred to as “elders”, “pastors” and “overseers”, though these terms are different ways of describing the same people.

- In verses 18b-21, Paul reminds the Ephesians of his ministry among them. Though a vicious smear campaign had been leveled against Paul in Thessalonica, he reminds the Ephesians of aspects of his ministry.

What do you think he means by his humility, his tears, his testings and his faithful teaching ministry?

- In verses 22-27, Paul turns from reminding the Ephesians of what *they knew* to what *he knows*. It has been written that Paul’s “overriding concern is not at all costs to survive, but rather that he may finish the race and complete his Christ-given task of bearing witness to the good news of God’s grace.”

What is your Christ-given task? How could you best finish the race you’re created to run?

- In verses 28-35, Paul exhorts the Ephesians elders to keep watch, shepherding Christ's flock in the midst of soon-to-arrive wolves.

To what or whom do you think Paul is referring in verses 29-30? (see similar language in Ezekiel 22.27, Matthew 7.15, Luke 10.3, and similar concern in 1st Timothy 4.1-3, 2nd Timothy 1.15, and Revelation 2.1-7)

Note also in Paul's later letter to this church (4:14): "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

h. Read Acts 20.36-38

Why are the Ephesians so grieved by Paul's departure? When have you felt similarly at the departure of a spiritual leader? Why?

Time permitting, read through chapter 1 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, written warmly to these partners in ministry.

IV. Pray

- Lift up the Good Shepherd community, that we too would *parakaleo* to one another, appealing, exhorting, encouraging, comforting and consoling,
- Pray for all those you know who engaged in Christian ministry and mission, that they would be led by God's Spirit and would lead His people to love His Word,
- Ask God to draw you deeper into His Word to send you further out into His world to love Him and those He loves.

Weekly Reading Schedule

Monday, February 6th	Acts 20.1-6
Tuesday, February 7th	Acts 20.7-12
Wednesday, February 8th	Acts 20.13-24
Thursday, February 9th	Acts 20.25-38
Friday, February 10th	Acts 21.1-17