*DEVOTIONAL*

April 2 - 7

*A Midnight Miracle*

**Monday, April 2 Acts 20:1-6**

*“He encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through”*

After encouraging the Ephesians Paul leaves for Macedonia. He travels through the area speaking many words of encouragement; eventually he reaches Greece. Encouragement is a key theme of this chapter. The wording of verse 2 suggests that he spent a substantial time in Macedonia, unlike his first visit where he had to leave three Macedonian cities in a hurry (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea). Some scholars suggest that he stayed one to two years in this area in order to strengthen the churches.

Paul may have wanted to go to Jerusalem in time for the Passover. He was about to sail on a ship bound for Syria, which possible carried Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the feast. But he found out about a plot against him, possible by some of the people traveling on the ship. As a result, he decided to take the long route on foot through Macedonia, traveling north instead of east. He spent Passover in Philippi. According to his revised plan, he hoped to be in Jerusalem in time for the next feast, Pentecost.

*Thank you, Lord, for those who encourage us in our faith. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 3 Acts 20:7-12**

*“He’s alive!”*

In Troas the Christians met “on the first day of the week.” Here is the first clear reference in Scripture to the believers meeting for worship on a Sunday. We are not sure whether Sunday worship had already become a regular practice in the church or whether this meeting’s being on a Sunday was coincidental. By the time the Didache (a document outlining practices of the early church) was written (late first or early second century) Sunday worship seems to have become commonplace.

As friends often did in those days when they met after a long absence, they talked into the night. Luke adds an observation about “many lamps in the upstairs room,” perhaps to suggest why young Eutychus fell asleep. The hot atmosphere caused by the crowd and the lamps made it difficult for a youth who may have put in a hard day’s work to keep awake. Luke tells us that Eutychus died as a result of his fall. Thus, Paul’s comment, “Don’t be alarmed, he’s alive,” refers to the young man’s state after he was healed.

*Your power is great, Lord, bringing life from death. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 4 Acts 20:13-17**

*“He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem”*

Paul’s companions took a ship from Troas bound for Assos, but Paul left a little later and journeyed on foot. Was this so that he could avoid choppy weather? Did he want to stay a little longer to ensure that young Eutychus was well? Or did he just want to be alone? Or did he keep changing his plans because he was carrying a lot of money for the Christians in Jerusalem and did not want others (apart from his close colleagues) to know where he would be at a particular time? Whatever the reason, the twenty mile walk alone would have done him a lot of good.

In Assos Paul rejoined his companions and together they headed for Miletus by ship. These two ports were on the western coast of the mainland of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Between them were the island ports of Mitylene, Kios, and Samos. Paul avoided going to Ephesus possibly to save time since he was subject to the schedule of the ship or perhaps because it would have been dangerous for him to go there. Instead, he asked that the Ephesian church elders come to Miletus (about thirty miles by land).

*As we journey through this life, Lord, you guide us according to your purpose. Amen.*

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*A Midnight Miracle*

**Thursday, April 5 Acts 20:18-27**

*“I have done the Lord’s work humbly”*

Paul presented his life and ministry as an example to the Ephesian elders. First, *Paul indentified with the people*, living among them, serving God with humility and tears, and going from house to house. This enabled him to know what they needed to hear, so that he was able to preach everything that was helpful to them. Paul had a personal approach to ministry.

Second, *Paul was a witness to the gospel.* For Paul, evangelism is a serious responsibility as it calls people to repentance and faith. He says that his preaching was comprehensive in that he did not hesitate “to proclaim to [them] the whole will of God.” Consequently, he was able to declare that no one’s damnation could be blamed on him. *Third, Paul suffered because of obedience.* He attributes two actions to the Holy Spirit: a compulsion that is now driving him to Jerusalem and a regular warning that he will suffer if he goes to Jerusalem. This shows how our purpose is not to preserve our lives but to be faithful to our calling to testify to the gospel.

*May we also be able to declare, Lord, that we have done your work humbly. Amen.*

**Friday, April 6 Acts 20:28-31**

*“And now beware!”*

Paul is aware of the danger of things going wrong in Ephesus. He therefore both charges and sternly warns the church elders. Most important, they must keep watch over themselves. They are also charged with watching over the flock. This is such an important task that their appointment is the work of the Holy Spirit. While human wisdom may identify likely candidates for church leadership, we are always to be guided by the Spirit. The elders are especially to be on guard for “savage wolves” who will come even from within the church and distort the truth. When Paul was there he had warned people about this danger day and night with tears.

The elders must shepherd the flock, which is so valuable that it was bought by Christ’s own blood. Shepherding involves tending, caring for, feeding, protecting, and leading. The reference to Christ’s act of purchasing the church with his own blood reminds us that just as the good shepherd gave his life for the sheep (John 10:11), those who lead in God’s church must be willing to place the needs of the sheep ahead of their own, even at the expense of their lives.

*We pray that those who lead in our churches, Lord, care well for your people. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 7 Acts 20:32-38**

*“I entrust you to God”*

Paul commits the elders “to God and to the word of his grace.” The message they received enabled them to stay close to God. Today we have this message in the Scriptures. Though Paul may not have intended both Old and New Testaments here, we can legitimately extend it to the entire Bible, for unlike the time of the first apostles, when their message carried final authority, today we have the Word of God in which the message is authoritatively contained.

Paul concludes his speech by once more presenting the challenge of his own life as an example for the elders to follow. When he was with them, he showed sincere commitment. He did not covet what others had. Rather, he worked hard with his own hands to provide for the needs of the missionary team, and in the process he demonstrated one of the Christian aims for earning money: helping those who are in need. Finally, the grief expressed by the elders at Paul’s departure gives us an indication of how much he was loved. He had paid the price of opening his life to these people. They, in turn, reciprocated by opening their lives to him.

*We entrust the elders and pastors of our church to your care, Lord. Amen.*