

The End of Paul's Third Journey

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[0:00] So welcome here for this Sunday, September 21st, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is, bless you, Leah.! It's my joy to be the pastor here.

This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World. And as I said, I think I said last Sunday, as I look at the weeks ahead and some of the other things that are happening and I'm preparing for and planning for, I recognize that we are counting down this clock of Acts.

So we're drawing closer and closer to the end of this series. So as you know, they're available on the website, so you can always check out sermons that you missed or re-listen to things that you want to hear again.

And through this series, we've been digging into the early church. We've been digging into some of these events and places and people, the things that we read about in the book.

And as I mentioned a few weeks ago, we're going to skip over, you may remember, skip over some sections in Acts, just to hit some highlights because it's a big book.

[1:04] And as I mentioned in the past as well, I spent a lot of time unpacking the early sections because there's so much there. Not to say anything at this point is less important, but we're on the clock, right?

So we need to focus. And so here we are this morning. We're actually jumping over Acts 20. So I encourage you to read that chapter on your own, and fear not, I'm just going to give us a quick rundown.

So here's an overview of what happens in Acts chapter 20. So after the riot in Ephesus, which we read about in Acts 19, Paul was determined to go to Macedonia.

So he passed through that region, and he encouraged the churches in that area on the way as he went to Greece. He'd planned to sail from Greece to Syria, but a plot against him was uncovered, and he decided to backtrack through Macedonia.

He eventually made his way to a place called Troas and met with the believers there. And while Paul was preaching there, a young man named Eutychus fell asleep in the third-story window of the house where they were gathered.

[2:16] Unfortunately, Eutychus fell from that window and died. Paul immediately went downstairs and raised Eutychus from the dead. So needless to say, that had an impact on the people at that time.

Paul boarded a ship in a place called Assos and sailed to a place called Miletus or Miletus. He wanted to get back to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and so he decided to call the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus, this place.

So Paul reminded them of his work in their city in the past. Remember, we've talked about the significance of Ephesus in Paul's ministry. How Paul had faithfully taught the comprehensive truth of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, right?

Paul was a very inclusive preacher and teacher. He told them he was going to Jerusalem and did not know what awaited them there. But God had revealed that he, Paul, would not see any harm, sorry, any of them, these people in Ephesus, again in his lifetime.

It's interesting news, right? To be following Paul and engaged in his ministry and have him say, so what does that mean? Oh, it probably means he just won't be back. Or it might mean something else.

[3:37] So Paul told the church leaders there to carefully guide the disciples who God had entrusted to them. He encouraged the church leaders. And he also told them they were going to be challenged by, the words say, savage wolves from both within and without.

People who would try to do damage to the people of their churches, their bodies of believers, and to the name of Jesus itself. So Paul reminded them to work hard to help the weak and to dedicate their lives to serving others.

Good messages for all of us. And when Paul finished speaking, they all knelt and prayed. And it says, with much weeping, they accompanied Paul to his ship. So our passage for this morning picks up in Acts 21, verses 1 to 17.

Not as long as it sounds, fear not. Acts 21, 1 to 17. So turn in your Bible to that passage and I will also read it for us. After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos.

The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria.

[4 : 56] We landed at Tyre where our ship was to unload its cargo. We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city and there on the beach, we knelt to pray.

After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship and they returned home. We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemy where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day.

Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, the Holy Spirit says, in this way, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

[6 : 02] When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, the Lord's will be done. After this, we started on our way to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Manasseh where we were to stay.

He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. Our sermon this morning is titled The End of Paul's Third Journey and that's, I think, self-explanatory where we're going to travel this morning.

So after Paul had spoken with the Ephesian elders, as we've just heard about from Acts 20, Paul and his companions immediately left that place called Miletus by ship.

And then we learned from this brief overview of Acts 20 we just talked about, Paul wanted to go to Jerusalem. That was on his mind and on his heart. So I don't know if you noticed this as I read the passage for this morning, but this last leg of Paul's third journey reads a bit like a journal.

[7 : 21] Did you perceive that a little bit? Maybe it came, some scholars suggest, maybe it came from a diary of sorts that Luke, the author of Acts, had kept during that time. But it's very facts-based in that section.

And it lays out some of the details of things that Paul had said. But there's also a lot of detail of their travels. Did you get a sense of that? We went here, then we went here, we sailed over here.

So Luke's account in this chapter gives a lot of minute detail about events as well. And we talked about, in the past, about Luke being very concise in his writing.

Remember, he was a physician, right? Just the facts. But he seemed to go into more detail here. Perhaps he felt the events and details of this part were becoming more important in this stage of Paul's ministry.

That's possible. But Luke really digs into the details of their itinerary on this leg of the journey, on their way from Miletus to Jerusalem. But there's also brief mentions along the way in this passage of Christian communities that he spent time with.

[8 : 32] And Luke's description includes several different things of interest. So let's follow along with that a little bit. So from Asia to Syria, Paul and his companions first sailed, as I mentioned, from a place called Miletus to a place called Patara by way of the islands of Kos and Rhodes.

That was places on the way. So given the shorter distance of travel and if you look at a map, I don't have a map on the screen, but if you look at a map of these areas in the New Testament times, they were relatively close to the mainland.

So it's possible and scripture suggests that they probably traveled in a smaller vessel, a smaller ship. And then we learn that when they reached Patara, they transferred to a larger ship that was headed for Phoenicia.

So they were going out across the ocean and needed to be on a larger vessel. Patara was a large city, likely because of its fine commerce and it was a very notable maritime destination. It had strong inland trade as well. And Patara's importance can also likely be judged by some extent to the fact that it issued its own coinage around the 4th century BCE.

[9 : 50] Interesting, right? So it's not no small thing during the time of the Roman Empire for a community to have its own currency. Patara maintained really strong commerce ties with Egypt and the city became a really favorite stopping place for travelers who were headed from Egypt to western parts of Asia.

So it was a central destination where people would stop, change ships, restock, do things like that. And parts of the ancient city of Patara can still be seen today.

Some of its walls, some of its baths, like community baths, and a theater even can still be seen in that area. So sailing from Patara, Paul and his group headed to the large Phoenician city of Tyre. And Tyre is mentioned a lot in the New Testament. So if you ever want to do that, do a, what's the word I want, concordance search for Tyre and learn all about where it's mentioned in scripture. So they were headed to this Phoenician city of Tyre and they were passed by, scripture tells us, the island of Cyprus on their way there. So why it's mentioned that they passed by Cyprus, didn't stop there, possibly just charted a course that was a certain way they went.

[11 : 09] But Luke mentions it, so it's obviously important. So the ship had cargo to unload that we learn and likely other passengers as well. So if people were traveling on this ship, they wanted, they were going to a different destination.

So like when you take a bus or the LRT or whatever, you aren't necessarily going all the way to the end of the line. You might have a stop along the way. And so Paul and his group landed at Tyre and we read that they sought out disciples of Jesus there.

Smart move, right? Friendly audience, friendly place to stay. And they stayed with those folks for seven days. And the interaction with the Christians in Tyre is interesting to me because they urged Paul, it says, through the Spirit, not to go on to Jerusalem.

They felt that. They sensed it. They felt the Spirit moving in that way and they really didn't want him to go. So why did they receive that message from the Holy Spirit?

It's a good question. Wasn't it always God's plan for Paul to head to Jerusalem? Well, what we ultimately come to see here, I think, is that it wasn't the destination that was to be paused or changed, but perhaps the timing.

[12 : 23] Have you ever had that happen in your own life? You probably have. Where you feel God leading in a certain direction and then you feel a sense of hesitation. Sometimes God gets us to go in a direction, as Vern has said before, it's hard for God to move a car that is sitting still.

So he wants us to move from being parked to into motion. But that doesn't mean God is leading us right to the destination according to the timing that we perceive.

It may not be the right timing. And then it's interesting, this kind of reinforces this idea, because Acts 21, verse 5 says, when it was time to leave. Interesting statement, right?

I don't think it means that we're not, I don't think we're supposed to get the sense there that someone said, oh, okay, it's Tuesday, let's go, because Tuesday feels like a good time.

It feels like there's more to it than that. And again, while Luke doesn't go into detail, we get a sense that Paul and the believers at Tyre seem to have sought God's direction and sought his timing on the next leg of this journey.

[13 : 32] The trip didn't continue, it paused, right? And it did not continue until that next step was clear. Right? So, are we seeking God's direction and are we listening for his timing?

So again, what was the reason for this pause? The reason for this delay? Well, literally, only God knows for sure, right? We say that expression, but in this case, it applies.

Literally. So then we read that at the end of this pause, Paul and his companions were escorted by the disciples of Tyre and their families. The whole community came together and they knelt on the

shore and prayed together.

That's so moving, right? Everybody comes together as a community to encourage what God is doing with Paul and his followers. So then Paul and his companions boarded their ship and we read that the disciples of Tyre returned home, right?

Their mission was complete. They saw these folks on their way and they returned home. So we read in Acts 21, verse 7, that after leaving Tyre, Paul and his group sailed to the city of Ptolemy.

[14 : 43] You can see the spelling on there. It's not Ptolemy. You can try it that way. Just like it's not Ptolemy. Anyway, I digress. So Ptolemy is located in modern-day Israel.

It was a major port city again and it served as a crucial point on the main sea and land routes in ancient times. Before Caesarea, okay, let's pause.

Which Caesarea? Anybody remember? Ah, thank you. Maritima. Caesarea, Maritima, became the primary port. So Ptolemy was an important port at the time and then Caesarea Maritima became the most prominent port.

And we read that they're greeted there at Ptolemy by more brethren, it says. So the presence of brethren, brothers and sisters in Christ, indicates the existence of a Christian community in that city. It demonstrates and reminds us, I think, of how the gospel was spreading. Right? This is an area far from where the gospel was first preached. So then, after only staying with the disciples in Ptolemy for one day, they traveled on to Caesarea, Maritima.

[15 : 58] And when they arrived there, they stayed with a man named Philip the Evangelist. Do you remember Philip? Philip is the one who spoke with and converted the Ethiopian official on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Do you remember that story? We learned from our passage this morning that Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. And then, speaking of prophecy, we also learned that a prophet named Agabus came all the way from Judea to speak with Paul.

He had a message he needed to deliver. And so, Agabus shared a prophecy from the Holy Spirit that the Jewish leaders, remember, he used Paul's belt as an illustration, would bind Paul, would hand him over to the Gentiles, presumably to be tried, put in jail, or worse.

We hear Luke's voice so clearly here because, again, we've talked about this in the past. Luke says, we sometimes, right, indicating to us that he was there.

We, Luke and Paul's other companions, and the people there, he says, the believers at Caesarea, they all pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

[17 : 10] All these people, all these people who were sincerely plugged into God's will heard this message of warning. So I think it's really worthwhile hearing Paul's response here again from Acts 21, 13.

He says, why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

It's a deeply inspiring commitment, right? There's fearless confidence there, and an unwavering trust in God and in the calling that he had placed on Paul's life.

In the final verses of our passage this morning, we learn that Paul and his companions left Caesarea to head to Jerusalem. Remember, final destination. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with them.

So, unlike people along the way who had sent them on their way and blessed them and stayed behind, some of the people from Caesarea went along. And it sounds also like the Caesarean folks may have been some travel coordinators along the way, too.

[18 : 15] They brought Paul and his companions to the home of an early follower of Jesus from Cyprus, a man named Manassan, where they were to stay, right? So, they had an Airbnb even back in the day.

So, our passage then closes with the recognition that Paul and his group were warmly received by the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. So, there is a happy ending after this tension and worry over Paul going to Jerusalem.

And this, friends, is how this missionary journey ends. So, was it successful? Well, let's consider some things. The impact of Paul's third journey included a lot.

He strengthened churches along the way in Galatia and Phrygia and Ephesus, Macedonia, Achaia, Troas, Syria, Caesarea, all those places.

Paul established churches or helped to establish churches and then returned to encourage them. What about spreading the gospel? Well, the gospel, as we've talked about, spread from Ephesus and beyond into Asia.

[19 : 22] And this likely led to the formation of churches in Colossae, Herapolis, Laodicea. The gospel was preached as far as the Roman province of Illyricum, far from its origin.

What else? Well, scholars suggest that Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Corinthians and Romans during this third journey. Not to be minimized, the impact of those things.

In those letters, Paul addressed current problems, but he also taught and gave guidance on daily Christian living. And I'm sure for many of you, 1st and 2nd Corinthians and Romans have given you hope and guidance and discipleship and encouragement.

And as you know, we're going to be looking at Romans in the new year. So, Paul also sought to motivate Gentile Christians in helping needy Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. It's another impact this journey had.

So, it's interesting, right? Paul was led to take the gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles and then encourage the Gentiles to go back and show Christian love to the people that came before them.

[20 : 34] It's powerful. The events of Paul's third journey also had an impact on issues such as baptism, where there might be a need for re-baptism. Remember, we talked about that.

Church worship talked about when and why Christians assemble. Paul was very clear on some of those pieces. Church organization. Paul talked about, and it's a model for us to this day, the roles and responsibilities of church leaders.

Paul was also clear about being on guard as we heard this morning. The roles of leaders to stand strong not only in their own faith, but to seek to protect the people under their care from false teaching or other dangers that might come.

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem must have been with mixed emotions, and we'll see that in Romans.

Paul was coming to Jerusalem partly to deliver a collection of goods that had been donated by Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor Christian community in Jerusalem.

Very neat. Romans 15, 28 also tells us that Paul originally intended to travel to Rome and then to Spain after he finished delivering those gifts.

[21 : 51] but Paul also knew that the persecution or worse likely waited for him in Jerusalem just as it had been in nearly every community, right?

We've seen it over and over where he debated and taught and preached. He faced persecution.

Looking ahead, we'll see that within 12 days of his arrival at Jerusalem, Paul would be dragged out of the temple, beaten by a mob, almost scourged by Roman soldiers, barely able to escape an assassination plot on his life and be imprisoned in Caesarea.

And we'll get there in the weeks to come. Remember, the Apostle Paul was just a human being like you or me. He had strengths and challenges.

He boldly struggled with sin in his life. He declared it in his writing. But what we can learn from his example is that in everything, just as Paul did, we can trust that God is with us.

He will never leave us. Friends, God has called you and me to join him in reaching the world with the amazing good news that it so desperately needs.

[23 : 12] News of healing and redemption. News of hope and restoration. News that we have an eternity that waits for everyone who believes in and follows him.

My brothers and sisters, we have a job to do. Maybe you've heard this quote before. Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.

When we live our lives by putting Jesus first in everything, our lives and ultimately the whole world will be changed. Amen.