

**Text:** Ac 20.13-17, 2 Cor 11.28

**Proposition:** The details of Paul's travel in Acts suggest the careful forward thinking necessary for perpetuating Christian ministry.

Our passage today is yet another "travelogue" in this section of Acts. I had considered just sliding on by without much comment. It is a passage where that is easy to do. It isn't one that has much insight into the apostle Paul's life and ministry.

However, as I read through the commentaries on the passage, one of them made a remark that brought me up short and made me think that there is something in this passage that we need to pay attention to after all.

As I meditated on the passage, another passage also came to mind, and from it I derive the title for our message:

### *The Care of All the Churches*

The title comes from 2 Cor 11.28, where Paul is in the middle of discussing his many troubles and sufferings in the ministry:

2 Cor 11.28 Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.

KJV 2Co 11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

The context may have a negative cast as Paul is talking about troubles, but when we look at his legacy, this care was what Paul was all about.

The care of the churches was the ministry. It is the ministry still.

I think the next thing I should do is give you the comment from Darrell Bock that got me thinking along these lines:

"In sum, this unit gives us a sense of Paul the pastor. Here he seeks to instruct his people as he departs. One of the highest priorities for Paul in ministry is that his people will be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he is gone. In a sense this is the Pauline legacy, to ensure that he leaves behind not a monument to himself, but Christians who are a monument to God in their faithfulness. It is also clear that part of what

makes this ministry possible is the commitment of time that people give to hearing the word.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, let’s look at our travelogue and see if we can find evidence that supports the ideas Bock is raising here. If we can (and I think we can), our quiet little passage has something powerful to say to us about our ministry right here in Victoria.

Read Ac 20.13-17.

## I. The carefulness of Paul’s travels

### A. The first step after Troas (13)

1. The traveling team boards ship for Assos
2. Paul stays behind to travel by foot to Assos
3. The distance to Assos by land is about twenty miles
4. The ship had to go around “Cape Lectum (modern Baba-burun)” to get to Assos.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible doesn’t give a reason for this decision, but the commentators speculate. More later...

### B. The step by step progress to Miletus (14-15)

1. The island just below Assos is Lesbos, where they stopped at Mitylene (about 44 miles from Assos)
2. The next day they sailed to Chios (island and city) which is opposite Smyrna on the mainland. Chios is the birthplace of Homer (about 750 BC)
3. The third day they sailed to Samos, not named on our map, birthplace of Pythagoras (about 570 BC)
4. The fourth day they stopped at Miletus (about 30 miles south of Ephesus)

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 622.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 1988, 386.

“They evidently put into port each night. The winds usually died during the night, and the rocky coastal area was more favorable to daytime sailing.”<sup>3</sup>

### C. The decisive stop at Miletus (16-17)

1. The verb, “decided,” suggests that Paul made the decision early on, not a spur-of-the-moment decision
2. The reason given: “hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost”
  - a. Passover occurred while Paul was in Philippi (v. 6)
  - b. We are already more than two weeks into these travels
  - c. About thirty days remained until Pentecost<sup>4</sup>
3. Luke does not mention why a stop to Ephesus would delay too much
  - a. Paul left Ephesus in a hurry after the riot about a year before (possible concerned about complications following that)
  - b. Paul knew a lot of people in Ephesus, perhaps thought it would delay too much to meet with them
  - c. Paul could have been tied to the ship’s schedule, not his own, and the ship passed through Miletus, not Ephesus
  - d. In any case, the verb, “spend time,” graphically illustrates Paul’s hurry
    - 1) χρονοτριβέω *chronotribeo*
    - 2) From *chronos* “time” and *tribo* “rub, wear away”
    - 3) Hence, “to wear away time”
4. At Miletus, there was a holdover in the travel schedule, so Paul called for the elders of Ephesus (17)

From this point, the chapter focuses on Luke’s notes of Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders. We will pick that up in coming weeks.

<sup>3</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 420–21.

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Ac 20.16.

## II. The priority of Paul's attention (the people)

### A. Why did Paul walk to Assos?

#### 1. Commentary suggestions

Polhill: "Just why Paul did not depart with the boat at Troas is not specified. He may not have relished the difficult voyage around the Cape, or he may have wished to spend the last possible moment at Troas, or perhaps the incident with Eutychus had delayed him."<sup>5</sup>

Bruce is more definite: "Paul ... stayed till the last possible moment, probably to be assured of Eutychus's complete restoration to consciousness and health, and then took a shortcut by land to join the ship at Assos."<sup>6</sup>

#### 2. I tend to favor the "people" reason: Paul always has ministry purposes in mind for his actions

### B. Why did Paul call for the elders of Ephesus?

#### 1. The call is planned and definite

#### 2. The message Paul gives is a farewell message (he doesn't expect to see these men in this place ever again)

a. Begins with an overview of his ministry among them (17-21)

b. Rehearses his present plans for ministry in Jerusalem despite risks (22-24)

c. Evaluates the character of his ministry in Ephesus (25-27)

d. Admonishes these elders for their future watchfulness (28-32)

e. Closes with an epitaph to his integrity as an example to the elders for their conduct (33-35)

Paul's intention is to prepare these men for coming days. His sermon here is the "prequel" to 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

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<sup>5</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 420.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, 385.

Some of the great concepts of “Practical Theology” come from this sermon

3. Big point: In Paul’s busy travel, he makes time for his people and points them to the future

### III. The legacy of Paul’s ministry

#### A. We are right at the end of the third missionary journey

##### 1. Review of 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey

- a. Churches in Crete
- b. Churches in Pergamos and Pisidia
- c. Churches in Galatia

In all of these, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (pastors) as they departed

##### 2. Review of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey

- a. Paul and Silas return to the field through Galatia
- b. The Holy Spirit prevents ministry in Asia (Ephesus) at that time
- c. They establish a church in Troas?
- d. They establish churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea)
- e. Paul has some converts in Athens
- f. They establish a thriving (and contentious) church in Corinth
- g. A brief beginning in Ephesus

##### 3. Review of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey

- a. Again, through Galatia on foot
- b. Spends almost three years in Ephesus, churches of Rev 2-3 likely founded in these days, through Paul or associates
  - 1) Ephesus (Rev 2.1-7)
  - 2) Smyrna (Rev 2.8-11)
  - 3) Pergamum (Rev 2.12-17)
  - 4) Thyatira (Rev 2.18-29)
  - 5) Sardis (Rev 3.1-6)

6) Philadelphia (Rev 3.7-13)

7) Laodicea (Rev 3.14-22) [Colosse, but these founded by associates of Paul]

c. Again, through Macedonia to Greece (Corinth) and back again until we come to Miletus as per our passage today

The first legacy: churches and pastors

B. We have the many writings

1. Paul's epistles

2. Luke's writings

C. We have a ministry philosophy

1. Preach the gospel

2. Guide and build the lives of converts

3. Prepare for the next generation

It is this last point that I think is the vital point of our passage today. Paul makes deliberate plans ... they involve his ministry to people, not as an ongoing thing, but to prepare them for the next thing.

"In sum, this unit gives us a sense of Paul the pastor. Here he seeks to instruct his people as he departs. One of the highest priorities for Paul in ministry is that his people will be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he is gone. In a sense this is the Pauline legacy, to ensure that he leaves behind not a monument to himself, but Christians who are a monument to God in their faithfulness. It is also clear that part of what makes this ministry possible is the commitment of time that people give to hearing the word."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 622.

## Conclusion:

Here is my proposition for this message:

**Proposition:** The details of Paul's travel in Acts suggest the careful forward thinking necessary for perpetuating Christian ministry.

Everything we do in our ministry has to be thinking ahead.

1. Of course, we want to build lives right now: discipleship
2. The purpose of discipleship is disciple-makers

The first generation of disciple-makers cannot last, the next generation needs to take up the task.

3. The purpose of disciple-makers is to make more disciples in the days to come

Sometimes Christians get wrapped up in the "present concerns" of life.

We do have responsibilities we need to fulfill, but let's fulfill them with an eye to the future.

- Teach our little children so they can grow up to teach their little children
- Build our Christian assembly so it can have the strength to move on when the founding generations pass

Let's not be morbid about this! But let's all be busy about the ministry!