

Why Church? – Acts 20

Acts 20. We've been on a journey through the book of Acts, to learn from the *early* church and apply it in ours; from *their* lives, for *our* lives.

And one of the recurring themes we've found, is that they were *compelled* – compelled by the Gospel and compelled by the Spirit; the Holy Spirit.

And this chapter is no different.

The Apostle Paul is in the middle of his third missionary journey, where he meets with a church and talks about church. How they did it, and what it's for.

Answering the question in *our* day, why church? Why do we do this, and why come?

Particularly appropriate for Back to Church *weekend*. (**Outline**)

So follow along with me, and let's see what kind of answers we find. Acts 20:1-7.

➤ [1] *After the uproar ceased* [the uproar in Ephesus over the influence of Christianity], *Paul sent for the disciples* [the believers in the church], *and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia*. [2] *When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece* [where Corinth was located]. (**Map, ESV Study Bible, 2126**) Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Corinth.

[3] *There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews* [most likely the Jewish leaders] *as he was about to set sail for Syria* [where Antioch was, his sending church], *he decided to return through Macedonia* [by land].

Why, we don't know. Maybe he feared getting thrown overboard, like Jonah.

What we *do* know, is that he took up a collection from the *churches* in Macedonia, for the church in Jerusalem. (Rom 15:22-27; 2 Cor 8-9)

For sure, that's one of the reasons he returned.

[4] *Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus* [men from many of the places he had planted churches]. [5] *These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas*, [6] *but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread* [Passover], *and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days*. Here's the pertinent part.

[7] *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight*. Let's stop there, because there's the first answer to our question.

Why church?

To worship like the Apostles (v1-7)

V7 – *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them; preached*. Because it says he gave a *speech*.

Except for the music, singing, this is how the early church worshipped. In one sentence.

1st, they met *on the first day of the week* (7). Sunday. The day of Christ's resurrection.

To emphasize it, and give the firstfruits of their *week* to the Lord, just like they gave the firstfruits of their *income*.

2nd, they *gathered together*. *On the first day of the week* [v7] . . . *we were gathered together*. Physically. In one place. That's how the *Apostles* worshipped.

They didn't stay home. They didn't *livestream* week-in and week-out. They didn't say their faith was private; which is code for “non-existent.”

They didn't sneer that church was “organized religion;” as if *dis*-organized religion is preferable.

They didn't declare that it was attended by a bunch of hypocrites, as if they were any better.

And they didn't stay away in order to avoid conviction or hide their issue with authority. They gathered. Together. Every week.

3rd, they remembered the death of Christ. In this case, by breaking bread together.

Remembering his sacrifice for our sins.

Not that we have to break *bread* to do that, but that we have to *remember* to do that.

4th, they listened to a *sermon*. Paul gave a *speech* it says. Undoubtedly from the Bible.

Because that's what he always did.

And 5th, they sang. We don't see it *here*, but we sure do in Paul's letter to the *Colossians*.

Col 3:16 – *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*.

Writing to a church, just like *our* church, he told them to sing.

That's how the *Apostles* worshipped.*****

They gathered every week, remembered the death of Jesus, listened to a sermon, and sang. And since the Apostles started the church and led the church . . .

Based on the instruction of Jesus and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should too.

That's why it's one of Core Discipleship Practices – Worship in Church.

Worship like the Apostles. That's the first answer to the question. (**Summary**)

➤ The second, is found in v8-12.

[8] *There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered* [probably conveying that the air quality wasn't so good]. [9] *And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead* [not as dead, but dead; they knew the difference].

[10] *But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.”* [11] *And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.* [12] *And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Comforted because of Eutychus, and comforted because of their time with Paul.

The second answer to “Why church?” is . . .

To experience God's grace (v8-12)

Including the grace of *miracles*. Not that anyone has been raised from the dead around here, but that scores of people have been raised to life. Spiritual life. Eternal life.

With changed lives to show for it. Just as much a miracle as being raised from the dead.

And part of God's grace that we *experience* at church.

As is his grace of *encouragement*. Like in v2 when Paul visited the churches in Macedonia and gave them *much* encouragement it says. It's part of church.

And so is the grace of *communion*. Breaking bread as it says in verses 7 and 11.

To commemorate all that Jesus *accomplished* on the cross, and receive God's blessing of peace and assurance because of it.

Something we do every 4-6 weeks. Often enough to keep it *fresh* in our heart and mind, but not so often that it becomes an empty ritual.

And last here, is the grace of *fellowship*. Like Paul experienced with the church in Troas when he conversed with them a long while (11). Into the wee hours of the morning. That's fellowship; friendship; camaraderie; brotherhood.

A grace of God so precious when we *have* it, we nearly despair when we don't.

Miracles, encouragement, communion, and fellowship – 4 aspects of God's grace just *waiting* to be experienced at church.

Which begs the question, "Why *not* church?" Why *wouldn't* you come? (**Summary**) That's the 2nd answer – to experience God's grace.

➤ The third, comes from v17-27; in Paul's conversation with *elders* of a church. But first, some travel details; v13.

[13] [Paul had departed] *But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos* (ah-sus), *intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.* Here's the map once again. (**Map, ESV Study Bible, 2126**) Troas is here and Assos is here.] [14] *And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene.* [15] *And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus.* [16] *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.* About 5½ weeks away.*****

[17] *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.* [18] *And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, [19] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;*

He made his ministry about the Lord instead of himself – *all humility*.

He wept with those who wept in their struggles and grief – *tears*.

And he persevered through the attacks of various people – *trials*.

I don't know how he did it. Especially the perseverance. But it helps me.

[You know, v20] *how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, [21] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

[22] *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit [he could do no other], not knowing what will happen to me there, [23] except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. [24] But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

[25] *And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. [26] Therefore I testify to you this day*

that I am innocent of the blood of all [in other words, if you blow it, it's not on me], [27] *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*

Why church?

To hear God's Word (13-27)

We *come* to church, we *belong* to a church, to hear God's Word.

It's not the *only* reason; but it's a *big* one. Because over and over again Paul says he *declared* God's Word to them. In *their* church. V20.

[You know, he says] [20] *how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, [21] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

He declared, he taught, and he testified.

What? Anything that was profitable. Which is *everything* in this book.

Where? *Where* did he declare it? Everywhere. In public *and* private.

Why? That they might repent and believe. Repent of their sin and sinfulness before God, and believe in Jesus to save them from the consequences.

He declared the Word, he taught the Word, and he testified to the Word. Especially the word of the Gospel. That they might hear and believe. Hear and repent.

The same reason *we* declare it.

And then he says it again in v24b – Nothing matters except to *testify* to the gospel of the grace of God.

And again in v25 – *I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God.* His rule and reign now, in the hearts of lives of those who love and follow him . . .

And his coming rule and reign over *all*, when he returns. I proclaimed it, he says.

And then he *ends* his testimony in this respect, right where he started. V27 – *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*

Just like he said in v20 – *I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.*

You think he was trying to tell us something? I think so. That church, is for hearing God's *Word*. Hearing it read, hearing it explained, and hearing it applied.

The question is, are you listening? Are you here, to hear?

Or do you come to get your social fix? Your box checked. Your conscience assuaged.

I hope not. I hope it's to hear and believe. Hear and apply. Hear, and declare it yourself.

➤ Which brings us to the 4th and *final* answer, from v28-38. (**Summary**)

[28] *Pay careful attention to yourselves* [still speaking to the Ephesian elders; guard your own heart, your own purity; follow Christ yourselves] *and to all the flock* [the whole church], *in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers* [elders, pastors, leaders], *to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Watch over them, because of all people, all things, the church is precious.

[29] *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock* [ravaging it; adversely influencing it]; [30] *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* [Even from within we'll experience naysayers and church-splitters.] [31] *Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with*

tears [caution everyone, confront them, reprimand them].

[32] *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace* [the Gospel, with all of its promises and blessings], *which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified* [the inheritance of life to the full and life forever for all those who believe].

[33] *I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.* [34] *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.* [35] *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*” [Paul lived it.]

[36] *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.* [37] *And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him,* [38] *being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.*

The 4th and final answer to the question, “Why church?” is . . .

To know God's love (28-38)

Not just spiritually, in a nebulous sort of way, but tangibly; from other *people*. People who *love* you, and extend *God's* love to you.

Especially leaders. Like the Ephesian *elders* in v28. Who Paul tells to *care for the church of God*. As in *love* it, provide for it, encourage it, protect it.

Because those who comprise it have been bought with a price; the very blood of Jesus.

Which makes church a place where your worth has nothing to do with your appearance or money, but everything to do with your redemption.

A place where you're protected by wolves and warned of lies. (29-31)

A place where you're built up by the word of God's grace. (32)

A place where you're spurred on to contentment, hard work, and generosity. (33-35)

A place where connections are made with others. (36-38)

Church is a place to know and feel God's love in tangible ways.

That's one of the reasons we invest so heavily in the ministries shown on this **card**.

From Children's and Student ministries, to Small Group, Men's, and Women's ministries – *this* is where love is felt. This is where church is *personal*.

So if you're not connected to one of these ministries, let me encourage you to do so.

You can go online, stop at the Information Desk, talk to one of our staff in the lobby, or call the church office. (**Summary**)

But whatever you do, don't miss out on the love of God. Or the Word of God, or the grace of God, or the worship of God. It's why we're here; why we gather; why church.

Prayer – Father, for those lacking it, give them a desire to worship like the Apostles, experience your grace, hear your Word, and know your love. And for those who have it, increase it all the more; making us conduits for those who need it and want it all the more.