



## Session Twenty-Four

### The Book of Acts, Pt.8

**Acts 18:23-21:16**

This week's readings cover Paul's return to Ephesus and his mission there (which lasted the better part of three years), his so-called "speech of succession" to the elders of the Ephesus church, and his journey back to Jerusalem.

1) Given that so much of the New Testament is given over to Paul's letters, and that a significant amount of Christian doctrine arises from Paul, we tend to think of Paul as something of a loner, going about his missionary work more or less on his own. But 18:24-28, for example, is a reminder of how Paul operated collaboratively with other individuals. What does this suggest about how we should approach discipleship?

2) In 18:24-19:7, we encounter the issue of "John's baptism" which is described as a "baptism of repentance." True baptism requires the Holy Spirit. How would you explain the difference between a baptism of repentance and baptism with the Holy Spirit? Why is the difference important?

3) Note in 19:8-10, that, for three months, Paul entered the synagogue and "spoke boldly" and "argued persuasively" about "the Kingdom of God." We've discussed in the past our own ability and willingness—or lack thereof—to speak in such a way. And certainly the case can be made that for a missionary like Paul, such behavior is more central to his calling than to that of a Jesus follower who isn't a missionary. But that may well be precisely the point: we don't see ourselves as missionaries. Yet Jesus certainly did see his followers that way. In what ways should we be missionaries today and what would that look like in our daily lives?

4) 19:23-41 should be disturbing to us. At the same time, it should not be a surprise, because the story of Demetrius and the Ephesians is very much our story today. In what ways is it the same? Where can you look in our own society and find situations that parallel those described in these verses?

5) The story of Demetrius and the Ephesians is also the opportunity to remind ourselves that the true measure of whether or not our lives have been transformed by our relationship with Jesus is if the focus of our lives becomes the Kingdom or remains ourselves.

6) Paul leaves Ephesus to return to Jerusalem (20:1-16) because he wishes to worship there for Pentecost. This part of his trip, therefore, is less missionary journey and more spiritual pilgrimage. Even so, Paul continues to teach, as the bizarre episode of Eutychus demonstrates. More importantly, however, this episode highlights the ongoing centrality of two practices to the early church: fellowship and intensive instruction. Why would these two particular practices be so important, especially among new believers or those just exploring what it means to follow Jesus? What are the implications of this for how we do church?

7) 20:17-38 contains Paul's so-called "speech of succession" to the Ephesian elders. This speech to Paul's followers about carrying on his work when he's gone is roughly equivalent to Jesus' words to his disciples about carrying on his work once he's ascended to heaven.

- a. Note 20:18, that Paul wants his followers to pay particular attention to how he lived when he was among them, not just to what he said.
- b. Look at 20:19-21. What is Paul saying is particularly important for anyone who serves as a leader among God's people?
- c. Read verse 20:24. Could you say the same about yourself and your own life?
- d. The threats to ministry Paul writes about in 20:28-31 may sound rhetorically overblown. On the other hand, there are threats to the ministry of every congregation. What are the threats you think we face here at CENTRALongmont?
- e. Do you see how the closer a church is to being the countercultural presence Paul—and Jesus—demand, the greater the number and magnitude of threats the church will face?
- f. Whom does Paul instruct (20:35) the Ephesians they are to support?

8) The case can be made that Paul's speech in 20:17-38 can be summed up as a warning to those who'd lead God's people that they are most susceptible to sin in terms of purity, possessions, and power. Paul's not alone in feeling this way; Jesus frequently warned his followers about their vulnerability in these areas. Why are these three so significant that they keep coming up again and again?

9) The prophecy of Paul's future from Agabus (21:10-14) is a reminder of Jesus' statement that Paul would discover how much he'd have to suffer for the Kingdom. We've talked more than once in the past about our own willingness to suffer for the Gospel, but a more important question, perhaps, concerns our willingness to obey the Lord's will no matter what. We needn't necessarily suffer in order to follow Jesus, but we must be willing to obey his will without regard for what we'd perceive to be the consequences. In short, we must be obedient. How willing are you to be obedient to the Lord's will for you, no matter what?