

Acts 20:1-12: How Do You See Those You Lead to Christ?

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I. Introduction

What does it mean to disciple someone and what happens during that process? Our job as Christians is to connect people with the One who is Life, the One with the power to set everything right in our lives. We teach them what that Life can do for them; we show them how to live like Jesus. Then something interesting happens: when you walk side-by-side with someone through life, you and they become one. What happens to them affects you and vice versa.

II. Acts 20:1-12: When You Disciple Someone, Are They Supposed to Become Close Family?

20:1-6, before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples to make disciples of all the nations, i.e., to show people how to live the way He did (Matthew 28:19-20). He said that those who become part of Him become a big family (Mark 10:30). Paul was one of Jesus' disciples (Galatians 1:11-12) and he did as his Master commanded. He showed people how to live like Jesus (1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 11:1). The result was that they became family to him. That's why after the riot in Ephesus, as Paul planned to continue discipling the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece), he gathered the Ephesian disciples and encouraged/embraced them. Paul cared deeply for these people (2 Corinthians 7:5-7); he saw them as his children (1 Corinthians 4:14-17; 2 Corinthians 12:14-15). This is how His Lord saw His Disciples: as family (Matthew 6:9), as His children (John 13:33), as an inseparable part of Him (John 15:1-17).

So after nearly three years of being with the disciples of Ephesus, of course Paul would gather them the way one gathers family before going on a trip. Having done so, he departs to Macedonia. We're not given details about Paul's visits with these churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, etc.), but we know that he did the same with them as with the Ephesians: he discipled them and encouraged/embraced them before leaving (20:2). Next he went to Achaia (Greece) and did likewise with the Corinthians for three months (this stay would've been especially meaningful to Paul since when he planted this church he stayed with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). But later the Corinthians demeaned and disrespected him. However, now most had repented (2 Corinthians 7).

When he was about to leave Corinth for Jerusalem (in Syria province), he discovered a plot against his life from some of the non-Christian Jews, so he decided to return the way he came, through Macedonia (perhaps visiting the churches again). By this time there were several individuals with Paul, representatives from the Gentile churches who had sent money to their suffering brethren in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26): Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy of Lystra, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Ephesus (cf. Acts 21:29). Paul sent them ahead to Troas, but he and Luke remained in Philippi until after the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (notice "us" and "we" in 20:5-6—Luke had stayed behind with the church in Philippi, Acts 16:40). After this Luke and Paul joined them in Troas.

20:7-12, Paul had actually stopped at the church in Troas when he first left Ephesus (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Now, as he's headed towards Jerusalem, he stops there again and stays with them for a whole week. The evening before he was set to sail (Sat or Sun depending on whether this follows Jewish or Greek time), Paul gathered the disciples and broke bread with them, which means sharing a meal together and then observing the Lord's Supper (sometimes called the love feast, 1 Corinthians 11:20-33; 2 Peter 2:13; Jude 12). At this meal, he preached a long sermon, until midnight. They were in the upper room of the house which was lit by many oil lamps. This may've made it suitable for nodding off. As Paul preached, there was a young man named Eutychus (a name that means "fortunate" or "lucky") sitting in a window sill. He was overcome by sleep and sank into a deep sleep. As Paul continued preaching, Eutychus fell out of the window to his death.

How would you feel if you were part of this church and one of Christ's apostles came to your church to encourage you, to give you more information about how to live like Jesus, how to handle this situation and that situation the way Jesus did, how to apply the Scriptures to real life, how would you feel if a young man from your church died in the middle of his presentation? It would leave you devastated. An event that was so hopeful, so uplifting, so instructive is suddenly brought to a standstill by the death of a young man.

Now, what if you were Paul. There you are, among people you love, wanting to give them as much information as you can before you have to depart, perhaps thinking that this is the last time you'll see them. Then out of nowhere, someone falls to their death. How would you feel? Something like this could end your ministry. It could so devastate you that you leave the mission field forever, which is why Paul's reaction is so incredible.

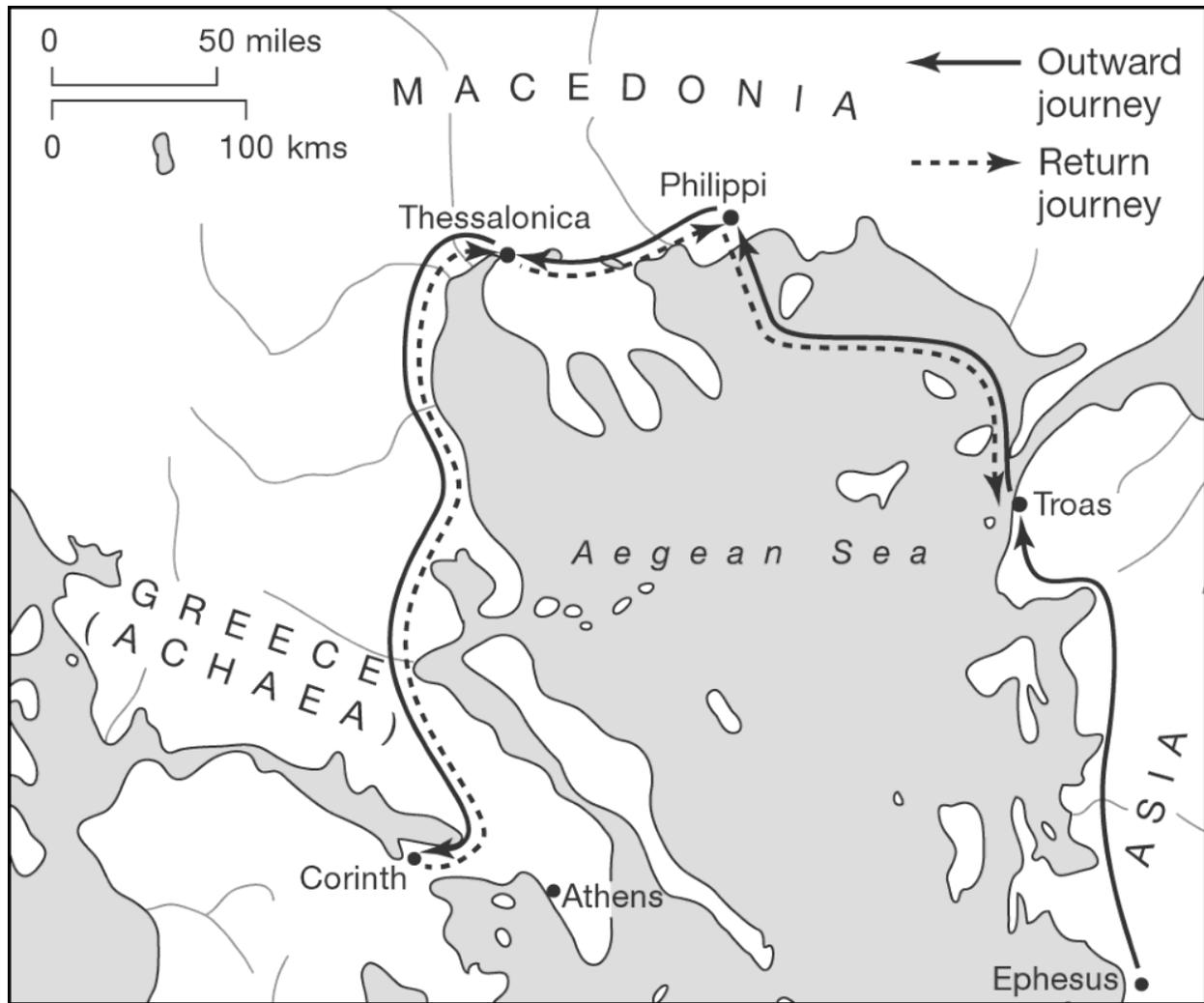
As the people were crying and some perhaps hysterical, Paul went into action. He went downstairs, embraced the young man, and brought him back to life, as he said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Then Paul picked up where he left off, i.e., he went back upstairs, ate with them, observed the Lord's Supper, and continued his instruction for several more hours, until daybreak! It's as if nothing ever happened.

Does your instruction about Jesus bring people life which turns back death? The way Paul brought the young man back to life is similar to what Elijah did in 1 Kings 17:21 and Elisha in 2 Kings 4:32-37. When you look at Elisha's case, when he lays over the child, his body lined up exactly over the child's, the child's body became warm. It's as if the Lord used the life that beat inside Elisha, His life, to overcome the death in the child. The Lord transferred the life that lie in Elisha to the child and he recovered.

That's what Paul did. He was bringing a message of life to the disciples in Troas and not even death could stop it. He was there to share with them the life that beat inside Paul, Jesus' resurrection life. He was there to proclaim to them more and more facets of that Life and how it delivers. That's why the young man's death didn't faze Paul. The moment it happened, Paul knew what he had to do to continue giving these disciples life.

Do you see Jesus that way, as the One with the power of life, to bring life to everyone's dying existence? When you disciple them, do you show them how Jesus can resurrect their marriage, their career, their relationships, their outlook, etc., etc? Do you and they become family the way Jesus and Paul did with their disciples, surrounded by God's beating life?

This is why when Paul left, the disciples were greatly encouraged. He instructed them for many hours on the Life that delivers and then gave them a vivid example.



III. Conclusion

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

¹ Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (p. 125). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.