

Acts 20

Aim of Lesson

To show Paul's great love for his fellow Christians, and his concern for the newly-formed churches.

Background study

Acts 21:1-16; 2 Corinthians 11:26-28; Ephesians 1:15-18; Hebrews 10:24-25.

Suggested outline of lesson

Point out Ephesus on a map and remind the children of the dramatic incidents that occurred there. Show clearly but briefly the progress of Paul's third missionary journey, in which he visited and strengthened all the churches in Macedonia and Greece, knowing that this was to be his last opportunity to do so. Wherever Paul went he exhorted the followers of Jesus, enjoyed their fellowship and gave them encouragement. His journey was not without danger, from the natural elements as well as those men who opposed him, particularly the Jews. Many companions chose to accompany him, and the children will enjoy hearing the list of their uncommon names in verse four. Show how Luke also joined Paul at Philippi (verse six) for the remainder of the journey back to Jerusalem. A voyage of five days brought them to Troas, their first port of call, where they had to wait a week before re-embarking. We can be sure that Paul spent the time profitably, preaching the gospel and discussing the scriptures with his fellow believers. The Christians in Troas naturally arranged for him to speak to them at their breaking of bread service on the first day of the week, before he left.

Picture them gathering together for the service in the upper room of a large house, three storeys high. The believers would have crowded in, young and old, whole families, and probably the only place Eutychus could find to sit was on the window-ledge. Describe the style of house, with thick stone walls and unglazed window openings. As darkness fell the lamps would be lit. Paul addressed the meeting for several hours and his words held the rapt attention of his responsive hearers. However, the young children present would have become tired and settled down to sleep on their mother's knees. Paul was still speaking long after midnight and possibly the flickering light, the warmth of the room and the lateness of the hour caused some to become drowsy. Eutychus, seated comfortably by the dark window, was overcome with sleep and fell three storeys to the ground.

Imagine the consternation and disruption when this tragedy happened. No doubt Luke, the doctor, would have been among the first to rush down to him, and he must have been greatly distressed when he saw how still and lifeless the young man lay. The crowd parted as Paul came down the steps and joined them, and they would have watched anxiously as he bent over the body. Briefly Paul held Eutychus close to him and then, straightening up, he quietly assured them that their friend would live. His friends were able to take him home, marvelling at the power Paul had from God, not only to heal but to raise the dead. This incident did not interrupt the service for long. Paul went back upstairs, broke bread and drank wine with them, and then stayed until dawn, talking to them and answering their questions.

In his keenness to spend every available moment conversing with his beloved fellow Christians, Paul had stayed up with them all night and had missed his sleep. Yet as soon as dawn broke, he had to set off again on the journey homeward.

At this point refer again to the map and show how at every port of call he eagerly made contact with the Christians. They greeted him with great affection, and expressed their sorrow at his departure. Describe the emotional meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus and summarize his words of farewell. This scene was to be repeated several times during his exhausting journey to Jerusalem. Some pleaded with him not to return there but, like his master before him, Paul had "set his face" to go to Jerusalem, even though he knew that suffering and imprisonment awaited him there.

Relevance to the children's lives

Paul's third missionary journey was mostly concerned with revisiting the those who had responded to his earlier preaching. Why did he want to do that? Why was it important for them to meet? What did he feel for these people, and they for him? Have you noticed that believers call each other brother and sister? Why should they do this?

Worksheets

Paul said 'However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the example of Paul, who cared for the believers. Help us to be caring in our attitude to others. Amen.

Memory verse

"Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).