

# Why Come to Church? – Acts 20:1-12

## Introduction

Why do we come to church?

That's a fair question isn't it?

To those who don't go to church it seems like an odd thing to do

For the majority of people, at least in my experience, Sunday is "fun day"

It's the one day of the week when most people don't have to get up and get things done so Sunday is when they sleep in or stay home and relax by lounging around or they go out just to do fun things like spend time with the family - many just use Sunday to unwind and try not to think of the week ahead

And sadly, more and more former church-goers are opting to regularly stay home and listen to a sermon online or through some other means – which by the way is perfectly acceptable occasionally like in times of illness

But week after week most of us get up, get dressed, and head to church for an hour and a half and some even come earlier just to go to Sunday school

What would you tell an unchurched person who asked you why you take the time and make the effort to be here?

Why you voluntarily give up the one morning of the week when you don't *have* to be somewhere?

**Perhaps you would say you come out of a sense of duty because the Bible tells us not to forsake the gathering together of the saints and that God desires our worship and you want to please him**

To be sure those are good reasons but, honestly, a sense of duty will only carry a person so far and most people won't be motivated to be in church if they don't perceive some personal benefit

We are going to be looking at **Acts 20:1-12** this morning and in this passage we are going to see three benefits to being a part of the activities of the church

Please open your Bible and join me in Acts 20 and follow along as I read verses 1-12

*1After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. 2When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. 3There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. 4Sopater 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. 5These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, 6but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.*

*7On 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. 8There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. 9And 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. 10But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." 11And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. 12And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.*

The passage divides pretty neatly into two halves with verses 1-6 making up the first section which describes Paul's journey from Ephesus to Troas and then verses 7-12 describing an incident that happened on his last day in Troas

**As we begin, let me give you little insight on sermon prep**

Sometimes when looking at a passage of Scripture the thread that ties it together isn't always readily apparent  
That was the case this week and I have to say I spent a good deal of time prayerfully scratching my head as I tried to determine how to present the passage without simply telling you a bunch of disjointed facts about it

The first hurdle is always to figure out just how big a chunk of text to preach on

Typically, I begin by looking at paragraph divisions for a clue but verses 1-6 didn't seem to have enough to craft a meaningful sermon so I looked to combine it with the next paragraph found in verses 7-12

Then in a book like Acts which is a book of historical narrative I look for a complete account to share

Frankly, the first section looked like a routine relating of Paul's travel that could easily be passed over with minimal comment in order to focus on the account of Eutychus in the second section but there didn't appear to be a thread that connected them

The first six verses are a concise accounting but they actually cover a period of at least a year and maybe as much as a year and a half that was a very busy time for Paul

During the time Paul was in Macedonia he wrote the letter we know as 2 Corinthians and during the three months in Greece, mostly if not entirely spent in Corinth, he wrote the letter to the Romans

So this was a period that couldn't just be brushed aside

And knowing that all Scripture is profitable and knowing that if it was included in God's Word there had to be a reason, I kept reading it through and pondering it over and over again until I saw the thread of the benefits of being a part of the church – then all of a sudden it made sense

The first thing I noticed was that the passage repeatedly used various forms of the word "encourage"

We find it as the root of "encouraging" and "encouragement" in verses 1 and 2 and again the same root is found in verse 12 where it is translated as "comforted"

And when I recognized that I saw that this was indeed one section of Scripture that was tied together by the idea of encouragement in the church

## **I. Encouragement**

So our first benefit of being an active participant in church life is **encouragement**

Last week we saw how the silversmith Demetrius stirred up the other tradesmen against Paul and his message and how that led to a volatile mob mentality that was only quelled by the town clerk's appeal to reason and only then after the mob had shouted itself hoarse enough that he could be heard

We saw how Paul had desired to go into the theater to defend the gospel and his friends and how he was restrained by some of the believers and friendly government officials

And here in **verse 1** we see that once peace was restored Paul prepared to take his leave from Ephesus so he sent for the disciples and after encouraging them he said his goodbyes and left

The Greek word here for encourage is *parakaleó* (par-ak-al-eh'-o) which means "to come alongside"

To encourage is to strengthen but also to exhort or to urge someone on in a positive way - to give someone courage

I can't help but think of the lion from the Wizard of Oz who thought he was a coward but who only needed to have his bravery recognized and revealed to himself

Just like that lion we all need someone to come alongside and give us the courage to carry on

We can only imagine what Paul said to the disciples of Ephesus to encourage them as he was leaving

But the fact that he took the time and made the effort demonstrates the loving concern Paul had for them

Paul didn't flee when the trouble started but waited until it was calm once more and then he gathered them together for one last word of encouragement

Then Paul headed back to Macedonia where he spend over a year visiting the churches there

During this time he went back to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea and he gave the believers in each city "much encouragement" as he went

Again and again we see Paul seeking to strengthen the Christ-followers in every place to persevere in the faith in spite of trials and especially in times of persecution – in person when he could and by letter when he could not

Then jumping ahead to the last word of **verse 12** we see that the people of Troas were "comforted" which has the same Greek root as the words "encouraging" and "encouragement"

So here we see the added nuance of encouraging not just from exhortation but from consolation - which is to give a person the assurance that all is or will be well

And Paul's resuscitation of Eutychus was a comforting reminder of the future resurrection of the saints

**Paul's example should be an encouragement to us in and of itself because it challenges us to also be encouragers**

In **1 Corinthians 11:1** Paul tells the believers at Corinth, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

We know that Jesus often exhorted and he often consoled his followers

And we read in **John 16:7** that the Holy Spirit is referred to as the "Helper" or *paraklétos* (par-ak'-lay-tos) which is the same root word as we have in Acts 20:1, 2, and 12

So to be an encourager is a very godly thing to be

And when believers come together as the church encouragement should be present in abundance

Paul himself was no doubt encouraged by the seven men who accompanied him as he left Corinth

They were a diverse lot as we see men from all over the areas where Paul had established churches

Still, they came together and demonstrated the unity of the church no matter how widely spread it may be

It's an amazing thing to meet a believer from far away as you begin to share with one another and realize the deep connection you have with this person you just met and how similar your two churches are in spite of surface differences

What a great feeling Paul must have felt as he saw the men joining together and pooling the offerings from their various churches to help the struggling believers in Jerusalem

Paul's ministry has been a productive one and now he has the opportunity to witness the product of his efforts engaged in ministry of their own toward others – I'm sure he felt like a very proud father

The world is full of criticism and put-downs that conspire to beat us up and break us down but church is a place to come to encourage and to be encouraged

**When someone asks you why you go to church my hope would be that you would say, "It's a place of great encouragement"**

***The plot and the trip to Troas***

Paul was all set to head back to Syria when he discovered by some means that some of the Jews were plotting to kill him on the voyage

Quietly killing someone and dumping their body overboard would be a very easy thing to do on a ship crowded with pilgrims heading toward Jerusalem

But Paul found out about the plot so he sent perhaps everyone except Timothy on the ship to Troas while he and Timothy headed overland to Philippi and so avoided the murderous conspirators

In **verse 6** we see that Luke begins another of the “we” passages and his presence undoubtedly accounts for the detail that is present in the account that follows

Remember at the end of the last “we” passage, Luke remained behind in his native city of Philippi

Luke reports that he and Paul joined the others at Troas where they remained for seven days – likely waiting for the next ship that was headed to where they wanted to go

In the course of his reporting Luke also reveals something very interesting about the church in a rather offhand way

He writes in **verse 7** that the church was gathered together on “the first day of the week” giving us the first unambiguous evidence that the practice of the early church was to meet for worship on Sunday instead of the Sabbath which would be the seventh day

We know it was a worship service and not just a casual get-together because part of the reason they were gathered together was to observe the Lord’s Table

In the early church it was common for the church to come together and enjoy a communal meal called an *agape* or love feast and to observe Communion as a part of that meal much like Jesus did with his disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal

Reading between the lines a bit we also see that Luke’s reckoning of a day is according to Roman thought which is midnight to midnight and not according to Jewish thought which is sunset to sunset because for him the “next day” began at daybreak

We also see that the church met in the evening because Sunday was not a day off and the believers would have needed to wait until they were finished with their workday before gathering together

## **II. Edification**

In their gathering we see the second reason to go to church – **edification** or enlightening or education

Or “learning” if you don’t like words that begin with the letter “e”

But it’s learning that has the capacity to improve a person because, as we know, not all learning is beneficial or edifying and some is actually just the opposite

There are times when we all might join Bob Seger in saying, “Wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then”

So, what did a worship service in Troas look like?

**Many a joke has been made about Paul preaching a too long sermon on this particular night**

But what Paul engaged in was likely less of a formal sermon and more of a conversation

The word we see here as “talked” is the same word translated “reasoned” in **Acts 17:17** and “tried to persuade” in **Acts 18:4**

So while there very well may have been a sermon where Paul addressed a particular topic – a word of encouragement seems a likely choice – it would seem there was also some back and forth dialogue and perhaps even a time of questions and answers that lasted all night

Imagine if you had the opportunity to sit under the tutelage of the apostle Paul and had the opportunity to ask him questions

I would expect that none of us would be in any hurry to see the time end – especially if we knew that it might well be the last time we would have such an opportunity

It's been said that if the stars in the night sky were only visible once a year all the world would stay up all night and I think that's what the believers in Troas were thinking on this particular night

Now, imagine the believers packed into a room on the third floor after having worked all day and no one in a hurry to get home because they were soaking up Paul's teaching

Consider that Eutychus fell out of the window, was killed as a result, was miraculously brought back to life, and rather than calling it a night they all went back upstairs, ate, observed communion, and continued with Paul's teaching

You would think that having someone fall out of a third story window might just be enough to break up even once in a lifetime time of edification with Paul but not so with the church at Troas

### **Those folks were committed to learning**

And the church is a place for learning whether it comes from a formal sermon, a class, a question and answer session, or even just from the casual sharing that goes on between believers

We should desire to be in church so that we can learn more about God and his character, more about what God requires from us, more about how to live our lives so that we become more like Jesus

None of us knows all we should know

Even Paul wrote in Philippians 3 that he had not yet fully arrived but by continuing to learn we discover where we are doing well and where we need to improve

### **When someone asks you why you go to church I hope you would answer, "Because it's a place of edification"**

I also hope that coming to church makes you feel better – that it energizes you for the week ahead

Coming to church should be **energizing**

## **III. Energizing**

I really feel kind of badly for Eutychus

He is called a "young man" in **verse 9** and later in **verse 12** he is called a "youth"

We need to understand that there is some overlap in the words that designate age in the Greek language and figuring out just how old someone was isn't as precise as we might like

The Greek word behind our English "young man" means a male person who is between the age of puberty but not of age to be married and the Greek translated as "youth" indicates a boy perhaps younger than the age of puberty

So while it's impossible to pin down just how old Eutychus was it's probably safe to say he was much younger than we've typically pictured him

He was just a kid maybe around 14 or maybe a bit younger and he had likely worked all day

But there he was in church doing his best to stay awake and listen to Paul

Luke also includes the detail that the room was filled with lamps and probably for good reason as it helps explain why Eutychus fell asleep

Those would have been oil lamp and Luke says they were "many"

I have to imagine the room was probably already warm because of all of the people packed in there

Now add in the soothing nature of a bunch of flickering flames and it's no wonder Eutychus was fighting sleep

I love to watch a campfire because the flames have a mesmerizing, hypnotizing effect that is very soothing

So I have empathy with Eutychus because staying awake had to be very nearly impossible even if it was Paul who was doing the teaching

I can picture Eutychus making his way over to the window in hope of catching a little bit of the night air from outside and then sitting on the window sill only to have sleep finally overtake him causing him to slowly tip out and down to the street below - what a tragic thing to befall one so young who was trying to do well

The account of Eutychus has often been used to warn against sermons that go too long and to point out the danger of falling asleep in church

### **But the reality is that there are two kinds of “falling asleep” in church**

#### **First, it's very possible, maybe even common to fall asleep physically – like Eutychus**

As the guy who stands up front and on a platform it's amazing to see how many of you wage a battle with sleep during church

**Now, I'm going to be very careful here not to make eye contact with anyone lest you think I'm talking about you specifically...**

Don't get me wrong – I don't hold it against you at all

I have to be honest and admit that I've fought that battle myself

It wasn't at church but I did fall sound asleep at my job once – no, to be perfectly honest I have done that twice

The first time was when I was working as a tool designer and working very long hours

I fell asleep at my CAD station and woke up only when my forehead hit my monitor

The second time was when I was working at WSD as a teacher's aide

Again, I was working insanely long hours at multiple jobs and taking two college classes so I was exhausted

So there I was; in charge of a 1<sup>st</sup> Grade boy, it was midmorning and I fell asleep during story time – and that was while sitting on a tiny little chair

So I get it – it happens and we can't always help it

Most of us live very busy lives and we rarely get the rest we need so when we finally sit still anywhere for any length of time the battle is on

I don't think any of you are in danger of harming much more than your ego if you begin to snore or fall over in the pew so I really am not too bothered by the thought that someone might lose the battle with sleep in church

I don't condone it or endorse it but I don't let it bother me too much

What bothers me is the knowledge that there are those who come to church but who are

### **Spiritually asleep**

Here's what I mean by that

There are several ways that people can have their eyes wide open and still be sound asleep while at church

**First**, we know that there are a certain percentage of people who go to church week in and week out who have **never truly been awake** – that is to say they are lost

They come and they hear God's Word preached, they sing along with the worship songs and the hymns, they listen to the prayers that are offered up

They might even be affected in an emotional or academic sense but they aren't fundamentally in harmony with spiritual things because they aren't truly alive

The example of Judas comes to mind when I think of this type of person – not the betrayal part but his unbelief

Judas travelled along with Jesus and the other disciples for 3 years without being detected

He heard the same messages, saw the same miracles, and saw who Jesus was the same as the others and still he remained lost

The truly frightening reality is that many of those people don't know they're lost and that their life's journey isn't headed where they think it is

In her younger days, Kathy rode the train from the suburbs to downtown Chicago and back each day and after a hard day at work she would sleep on the train coming home

Her mom always used to warn her that she was one day going to miss her stop and wind up somewhere she didn't want to go

Sadly, many people are spiritually sleeping in church and may well wind up where they didn't expect to go

The **second** type of sleeper in the church is the person who is **beset by sin** and existing in a backslidden state

Sadly, in most churches it's not unusual to find those who are truly believers but who are living in a kind of spiritual coma as they remain untouched by what goes on all around them at church

We regularly hear of Christians who have fallen into ongoing, habitual sin even as they regularly sat in worship services and even occupied themselves in what appeared to be godly service

And like a person who slips into a coma sin-induced sleep comes on a person gradually and often imperceptibly

I can't help but think of the example of Samson when I think of this kind of sleeper

As Samson slept peacefully in Delilah's lap he was unaware that the Lord had left him due to his backslidden state

It's possible to be saved and yet to allow sin to numb us to spiritual truth and to have everything appear normal on the outside while we become desensitized, unmoved, and unfazed by spiritual things and to slip into sleep and slumber on unaware that it even happened

The **third** type of sleeper is the person who is **overly familiar** with spiritual matters to the point of boredom

C.S. Lewis spoke of the person whose "hands are cauterized with holy things" meaning that a person can become so familiar with the holy that it loses all significance

Have you ever said a word over and over again until it lost all meaning? It can even happen with your own name!

For some, having grown up in the church can cause them to take it all for granted and become bored into slumber by that which has become routine even as they go through the motions due more to inertia than drive

**Complacency** can also lull a person to sleep as spiritual matters lose any sense of importance or urgency

Let's face it, unless we are in the midst of some crisis or another life pretty much falls into a regular routine

And we can be rocked to sleep by the constancy of our daily and weekly routine

We are well aware of the lost and we realize that they will spend eternity apart from God in hell if they don't accept Christ and we know that tomorrow is promised to no one because we see death all around us

We know that our mission is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and to witness for him and that his return could happen at any moment and our opportunity to serve him on this earth will be over...

But we convince ourselves that it probably won't happen today so we have time and we allow ourselves to slip into spiritual slumber and we hit the snooze button one more time with the promise that soon we'll get up and get busy

Then there are those who are spiritually asleep in the church due to a **critical spirit**

Even though criticism isn't one of the spiritual gifts there are people in the church who act as if their God-given role is to point out everything that is wrong in the church

And they are so busy looking for faults that they become immune to what God is **trying to show them** and how God is **trying to grow them**

They aren't hard to spot as their eyes are opened but narrowed down to scrutinizing slits as they mentally compile their list of grievances to be aired later

**Jim Van Dreser** likes to share the story of the family that was driving home from church and the father was complaining about the length of the sermon, the apparent tone-deafness of the choir director, and everything else that was wrong with the service when the son piped up and said, "I thought it was a pretty good show for a dime!"

Attitude is key in church just as it is in life in general so don't let a critical spirit put you to sleep to what God is doing

**This isn't a complete list as there are many ways to be asleep spiritually but I'm sure you get the idea**

Just as the threat of physical slumber should cause us to take steps to prevent the embarrassment of falling asleep in church so the existence of spiritual slumber cause us to examine ourselves and either recognize, confess, and ask God to awaken us from it or to take steps to prevent it

**Coming to church should energize us**

Being out in the world is draining for the person who is spiritually minded and seeking to be a public witness for Christ

And when we come together on Sunday it should be a time of renewal as we focus our gaze on God in the midst of our spiritual brothers and sisters

We should prepare for coming together as the Body of Christ just as we would prepare for any other important event in our lives like a big exam or a job interview by making sure we are rested and ready

We should come **eager** and **enthused** and maybe even **a little bit early** so we aren't rushed and distracted as we find a seat and we should ask God to focus our attention on him and what benefits he wants to bestow upon us through joining together with his people

**My hope would be that when asked why you go to church you would say, "It's where I go to get my batteries recharged; I go to church to be energized."**

## **Conclusion**

Why **do** you go to church?

I hope if someone were to ask you that question you would now be able to say that church is the place where you go to be encouraged, edified, and energized

But church is also the place where each of us should go to provide those things to others and we should be seeking to encourage, edify, and energize our brothers and sisters in Christ

We are members of a body and we should be here not just for what we can get out of it but also for what we can give to others

Church is meant to be a place of mutual benefit and every member of the body has a role to play in all three of the benefits of being here

I want to close with a passage that neatly encapsulates what we have heard today, **Hebrews 10:19-25**

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Let's pray