

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

August 22, 2021

We Are Better Together **“The First Day of Every Week”** **Acts 20:7-12** **Rev. Mike Fordham**

You may have heard about the golfer who was 20 minutes late at the first tee one Sunday morning, and the other 3 members of the regular four-some were almost ready to start without him. When he got there, he said to his golfing buddies, “I agreed with my wife that this Sunday I'd toss a coin to see whether I played golf or went to church. Heads, I played golf. Tails, I went to church. And you know fellows, I had to toss that coin 43 times before it came up heads.”

What priority in our lives is worship attendance? Is it a necessary part of our week, or every 2 weeks, or once a month? Is it a commitment we have made in our lives to regularly join with other followers of Jesus regularly to worship God or is it just something we do whenever it is convenient? A vital part of being a follower of Jesus is regularly coming together for worship where we meet God together and experience His presence and while doing so God uses all the elements of a worship service to shape our lives into being fully devoted followers of Jesus. Today, we are beginning a new sermon series entitled, “We Are Better Together” which points to some essential elements that together we share in as the church that serve to mold us into being fully devoted followers of Jesus. Today, we begin with the first of the importance of regularly worshipping together that can be traced back to what the first century followers of Jesus practiced. Let us now go back in time to a first century worship service where the Apostle Paul was the guest preacher.

Acts 20:7-12

⁷ On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight. ⁸ The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. ⁹ As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he fell sound asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. ¹⁰ Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. “Don't worry,” he said, “he's alive!” ¹¹ Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. ¹² Meanwhile, the young man was taken home alive and well, and everyone was greatly relieved.

WEEKLY WORSHIP

The setting for this worship service occurred during the Apostle Paul's 3rd missionary journey. Part of the missionary trip was to visit churches and collect an offering to give to the poor, persecuted, struggling church in Jerusalem. Paul was now in the city of Troas which is near the coast of what today we call the Aegean Sea in the western part of modern-day Turkey. One of Paul's fellow travelers on this trip is Luke, the doctor and historian who wrote the books of Luke and Acts. This part of the book of Acts is Luke's eyewitness account of what happened. Paul had already been to Troas on his 2nd missionary journey and now this visit was just for a very quick overnight visit. Paul's timing was perfect to see everybody as this was the first day of the week, which for them was Sunday, which was also the day that they normally all came together weekly for worship. The 1st century Christians went every Saturday to the Jewish Temple for worship and then they would meet for worship especially on Sunday evening in someone's home after they all got off from work. In some places they may have met other nights, but Sunday especially became the day that Christians would gather together for worship. Here at the church in Troas in Acts 20, their worship service occurred on Sunday evening after work on the 3rd floor of someone's home. Why on Sunday? This is resurrection day, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday for the Christians then was Easter Sunday. When they gathered together for worship it included elements such as the apostles' teaching, fellowship, sharing in meals, the Lord's Supper, prayer, taking up a collection for various needs, and worshiping and praising God together.

This was a habit for this church. The faithful followers of Jesus in Troas would not think about missing worship together for nothing. It was extremely important to their spiritual health, their entire lives. Today, in our churches, especially in North America and Europe, for most Christians, regularly worshipping together does not hold that high of a priority as it did for most of the first century Christians. Long before Covid hit, statistics tell us that worship attendance in all different denominations and churches was declining. If we asked people why their attendance has declined we would get a wide variety of reasons, all of which I believe I've heard.

Somebody put together a list of the top 10 reasons people do not attend worship more regularly and they took these same reasons and wondered what it would sound like to give these same top 10 reasons for why people do not bathe more regularly.

The top 10 reasons people skip cleaning themselves is:

1. They were forced to clean themselves as a child.
2. People who make soap are only after your money.
3. I wash on special occasions like Christmas and Easter.
4. People who wash are hypocrites who they think they are cleaner than everyone else.
5. There are so many different kinds of soap, I can't decide which one is best.
6. I used to wash. It got boring, though, so I stopped.
7. None of my friends wash.

8. The bathroom is never warm enough in the winter or cool enough in the summer.
9. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier.
10. I'm just too busy and can't spare the time.

As we know, if something is important enough to us, we will make it happen and often the reason we are not regularly worshiping together, whether online or at home, is because other things are more important to us. Barna Research has done a survey and discovered that 32% of practicing Christians, 1/3rd, have stopped attending church whether in-person or online during Covid. That's heartbreaking to hear, because not regularly worshiping with God's people is a sure path to drifting away from God and not following him as closely as possible. We desperately need each other to be faithful followers of Jesus and worship is one of the vital ways that we walk with Jesus together. Evidently, there were even those in the 1st century churches who were getting in the habit of skipping worship for other activities. To those then and today who have gotten out of the habit of regularly worshiping together with God's people, *Hebrews 10:25* says, "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*"

GOD'S WORD

There are many different elements, as I mentioned earlier, that make up a worship service. In the home church in Troas we see that there were 2 very important elements of worship that was highlighted that night and the first was that the people were devoted to the reading, preaching, and teaching of ***GOD'S WORD***. The atmosphere on that Sunday evening 3rd floor of the church in Troas, was probably all abuzz because they had none other than the great church leader, missionary, the Apostle Paul himself in town for one night and one night only. I'm sure they could not wait to hear Paul's stories about what was happening in all the other churches Paul visited on his journey, the new churches that he may have started on this trip, what news Paul had to share about what he saw in the world, and also what God had to say to them through one of the apostles. I would think that the 3rd floor was probably a little more packed than normal as they listened to the great Apostle Paul preach and teach God's Word. Luke also tells us that the room was full of oily, flickering lamps, and I would imagine probably pretty warm and stuffy with all those people crammed in it excited to hear the message. Evidently, a really great seat in the house for the service was taken by a boy anywhere from 8 to 14 years old, named Eutychus, who sat on the window ledge when Paul was preaching his farewell sermon. Did you notice that Paul's sermon lasted for hours? Did you hear that?

Today many churches have a large clock behind the congregation where it is quite obvious to the preacher. Some don't. The one where Rev. Sam has been invited to speak did not. As time went on, Brother Sam finally commented that he had forgotten his watch and asked, "Does anyone have the time?" By that time, he had been preaching so long that a man answered him saying, "There's a calendar right behind you." If you had been there in that 3rd floor worship service you would have probably noticed Eutychus' head begin to nod as he became sleepy, his eyes fighting to stay open. A child was asked one Sunday by the pastor if he knew why they had coffee at

the church. Without hesitating, the youngster replied, "To wake people up before they have to drive home." It is understandable why Eutychus was fighting sleep as the service probably started just after sunset when everyone was home from work and Paul was still speaking at midnight when Eutychus could not fight sleep anymore and gave into its power and nodded off to sleep, falling out of the window 3 stories to his death. Immediately, the worship service stopped, and Paul and the people ran downstairs to Eutychus and Paul bends over him, prays for him, and Eutychus is once again healed and back to life. Paul, then comes back up and they all sit down to eat and then Paul continues to preach until sunrise. So, if my sermons ever feel long just be thankful the Apostle Paul is not your pastor. In all fairness to Paul, his sermons were not the kind that we have today with one person talking and everyone just sitting and listening. Paul's speaking was more of a discussion, question, and answer format like we might have in Sunday School or a small group setting.

The people in that congregation loved to hear, talk about, and wrestle with God's Word so much so that they would devote themselves to it all night if needed, especially since Paul would be leaving the next day and they may never see and hear from him again. The reading, preaching, and teaching of God's Word, is meant to be an extremely important part of our worship together. *Hebrews 4:12*, reminds us of how powerful God's Word is. It says that *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* The reading, preaching, and teaching of God's Word, the explanation of its meaning and the application to our lives today is vital in our worship services. A worship service is meant to be a place where we are all together hearing God speak the same message to us, unifying us, and drawing us together in following Jesus.

We desperately need to hear God speak to us through the Bible and guide and direct our lives in this world. Worship can be the most beneficial for our lives when we not only come to worship regularly but also when we do come to worship, we come prepared, longing to hear God speak His truth into our lives, and hungry to apply it. Soren Kierkegaard said, "When you read God's Word or listen to it being preached or taught, you must constantly be saying to yourself, "It is talking to me, and about me." Do we come to worship rested, prayed up, and prepared to hear God speak, literally asking God to speak to us and help us hear the truths in the Bible passage and the sermon for ourselves? Do we come to worship longing to meet God in worship and tuned-in to hear God speak to us? Please know that when I preach and teach I will always do my absolute best to make the foundation of my sermon the authoritative Word of God as found in the Bible. In so doing, it is my hope and prayer that every sermon will then not only inform us of God's truth but also be used by the Holy Spirit to shape our lives in line with God's will.

EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE THROUGH THE LORD'S SUPPER

The people in the church in the book of Acts did something else very important to them when they came together on the first day of the week for worship. They not only devoted themselves to hearing God speak to them but also to **EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE THROUGH THE LORD'S SUPPER**. Their communion, or Lord's Supper, wasn't as formal as what we do in a worship service. It was patterned after the Passover Meal and Jesus' transformation of the meal with His disciples in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified. Their communion was experienced in the midst of a potluck dinner. After Eutychus' healing at midnight, they then ate together and shared in Communion. They had a kind of intermission from the sermon and had their meal. When they shared in the communion, they understood this to be a time to remember, experience, celebrate, worship, and thank God for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. *1 Corinthians 10:16, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"*

When we share together in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we are all together, in unity coming to God recognizing that we are sinners who desperately need God's grace that accepts us as we are, forgives us, and then heals, transforms, and redeems our lives. We recognize in Communion what Jesus has done for us and then we receive the love and grace of Christ.

There is a well-known painting of the Vietnam Wall depicting a man in his business attire standing at the wall, reaching up with emotion and touching the names of those who gave their lives in battle. The reflection in the polished granite is not of the man in his suit but of the men whose names he is touching, who are reaching out their hands to touch his. That is the Lord's Supper. We arrive at the table and reach out our hands to take this unleavened bread and this fruit of the vine. In response to our act of faith, Jesus, who has given His all for us, touches us with His real presence and God's grace and love. In Communion the table is set, prepared by our host, Jesus, and it cost Him everything to prepare and give this meal and it costs us nothing. What is our response to all that God has given us through this meal? Gratitude, deep appreciation, awe, humbly receiving what God has provided for us, and giving our lives to God? As the Psalmist said in *Psalms 34:8, "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."* When we come together and take of the Lord's Supper, the communion meal, this is a time to *"taste and see that the Lord is good."* Jesus has paid the price so that all who have received the healing and forgiveness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection can be transformed for all eternity.

Prioritizing regularly worshiping together, whether online or in-person, is absolutely essential in God's truth and grace - shaping us into the woman and man of God that God desires for us. Do we really desire to be fully devoted followers of Jesus? It cannot happen on our own or sporadically. This requires us to regularly be together in God's presence and allow God's truth and grace to have its way in our lives.

Icebreaker I – Describe a time when you fell asleep at an inappropriate time.

Icebreaker II – What did you think about the “Top 10 reasons to not bathe.”? Think of your biggest excuse to not attend worship (online or in-person), and apply the bathing analogy to it...

1. What was significant about meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week?
2. What priority does regularly attending worship hold in your life?
3. Why do you think Paul felt the urgency to speak “on and on”?
5. Can you at all identify with Eutychus?
6. Do sermons put you to sleep? Or are you wide awake spiritually?
7. How can you keep from falling flat?
8. What are some weaknesses or struggles in your life that you long to have victory over, but you continue to stumble and fall?