

Easter At Troas

Acts 20:1-16

Introduction

Nearly two thousand years ago a man stepped onto the stage of Jewish history and claimed to be the long awaited Messiah. He won the hearts of the common people, and for a brief moment, the city of Jerusalem sang his praises. His most popular title was “Star of Jacob”. It seemed he would finally throw off the Roman power. It was in the year 135 AD that this dynamic man, named Simon ben (son of) Koseva, actually captured Jerusalem from the Romans. But then, in another battle against the Roman army, he was defeated, executed, and buried.

One thousand years later, a man by the name of Zevi started one of the most organized and momentous messianic movements in Jewish history. Thousands of Jews believed that he would lead them back to the promised land. Yet, in 1666, of all years, Zevi was captured and imprisoned by the sultan of modern day Turkey. While in prison, this Messiah switched sides and, believe it or not, became a Muslim.

Three hundred years later, in our day, yet another in a long line of Messiahs captured the spotlight. An aged rabbi named Menachem Schneerson was being hailed as the true Messiah. He lived in Brooklyn; although his followers built an identical house for him in Israel. They said of him, “Moses was the first redeemer, the Rabbi is the last redeemer.” The Friends of Israel ministry estimated that before this rabbi died, nearly 300,000 Jews believed he was the Messiah. Even as he was dying in a hospital in New York, paralyzed by a series of strokes, leaders within his movement were confident that he would recover, come to Israel, and rebuild the temple.

These men were not the long awaited Messiah. They either abandoned their mission or failed to

defeat the enemy of mankind that King David said the true Messiah would defeat – the enemy called death.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the defining statement of authenticity. Healings could be staged; signs and wonders could be counterfeited; genealogies could be forged, but coming back from the dead is the ultimate proof that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

And there’s more! The church of Jesus Christ, founded upon the deity of Jesus Christ, is a church made up of people like us, who, as we are told in Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 5a,

even when we were dead in our transgressions, [we were] made . . . alive together with Christ . . .

Voltaire, the cynical agnostic, even declared that he knew a way to create a religion that could compete with Christianity. He said, rather tongue-in-cheek, what was indeed the truth, “We need someone to found a new religion; then all we need to compete with Christianity is for the founder to die and then be raised from the dead.”

Jesus Christ stands alone, however. He is the only One who ever dared to say, as recorded in John, chapter 11, verses 25 and 26,

. . . I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. . .

Now that is quite a claim – a claim Jesus backed up by personally conquering the grasp of the grave. He will prove His claim again in that coming day when the graves will empty at the sound of the trumpet. However, between that wonderful future

day and that past day when Christ arose, He illustrated His power over death . . . again.

Easter At Troas

Jesus chose to illustrate Easter in a little town named Troas. I invite your attention to the book of Acts, as we continue our study through this book, to chapter 20. Look at verses 1 through 5.

After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he departed to go to Macedonia.

When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia.

And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

Stop at these verses for a moment. Sometimes Luke shows the videotape in slow motion – showing close-ups and detail upon detail. At other times, like this, he puts the tape on play and then, pushes fast forward. As a result, events that took place over months of time whiz by at such a rapid speed that you are left saying, “Whoa! Wait a second.”

For reasons known only to the inspiring Spirit of God, Luke just raced us through a period of time when Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthian church, as well as his theological masterpiece, the book of Romans. For whatever reason, Luke is focusing on another event; another period of time in the life of the apostle Paul that is so significant that Luke seems barely able to wait to tell us about it.

Notice verses 6 and 7.

We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

If you circled every time Luke referred to chronology, you could circle the word “days” five times in just two verses. He refers to: “the days of Unleavened Bread,” “five days,” “seven days,” “the first day of the week,” and “the next day”.

Did Luke get a new Daytimer; a new watch with a built in calendar? Why the almost obsession with timing?

There are two reasons, and these two reasons would be entirely lost unless the Bible student learns to ask certain questions. We typically read the Bible and run to the question, “What does it mean to me?” We need to ask other questions first; such as, “Where did it happen?” and “When did it happen?” Great significance can be gained by asking, “Where?” and “When?”

For instance, when Jesus Christ stood in the temple and made that incredible statement, “I am the Light of the world,” He happened to make that statement during the Festival of Booths. One of the predominate aspects of that festival was a ceremony called the “Illumination of the Temple,” which took place in the treasury. The treasury was surrounded by galleries that were built to hold hundreds of spectators. And, in the center of the massive courtyard were four gigantic candelabra that reached high into the air. On the first evening of the Festival of Booths, these four gigantic candelabra were lit, and, it was said, they created an incredible blaze of light. These candelabra represented the pillar of fire that led their forefathers through the wilderness.

When Jesus made this statement, the Feast of Booths had just ended. The day before, in the treasury, these great candelabra had blazed forth their incredible light. Now they were dark; the flames have been extinguished. Look at John, chapter 8, verse 12,

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but shall have the Light of life.

The significance of that statement was dramatically underscored by the fact that, as John tells us in verse 20a,

These words He spoke in the treasury . . .

In other words, Jesus is seated in the same courtyard where these candelabra were located. The now darkened reminders stood there, as if to declare the light in the temple had been a brilliant light, but in the end, the temple was darkened once more. Jesus said, “I am the Light which lasts forever. Follow Me and you shall not walk in darkness!”

Where this happened and when it happened gives incredible significance to what happened.

When did this happen?

Now in Acts, chapter 20, the paragraph loses tremendous significance, unless you first ask the question that Luke obviously wants you to take note of. That is the question, “Okay Luke, just when did this happen?”

Easter

Notice verse 6 again,

... after the days of Unleavened Bread . . .

What was this period of time? The Passover. It was a time when Israel remembered its escape from Egypt; a time when God instructed their forefathers through Moses, to kill a lamb and roast and eat it. They were also to put some of the lamb’s blood on the door posts of their slave huts. Then, the angel of death would not take the life of the first born in their homes. That night the death angel came and took the lives of the first born of all those not protected by the blood of the little lamb. As for those who had obeyed, the angel of death passed over them – thus the word “pass-over”.

It was during the celebration of this period of time that Jesus Christ was crucified. While the nation ate their lamb and remembered their escape from death, the Lamb of God was hanging on a cross, delivering through His blood, all those who would believe in Him alone.

Verse 6 says,

... after the days of Unleavened Bread . . .

That is after the Passover – what happened after the crucifixion? What are we waiting for now? Easter! We are waiting for the resurrection!

So, first of all, Luke wants us to know that the events of the next paragraph took place around the time we call Easter – the completion of Passover and the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The first day of the week - Sunday

In addition, do you remember the day of the week that the resurrection took place? The first day of the week, or Sunday.

Notice verse 7 again,

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread . . .

This is another important piece of chronological evidence, “on the first day of the week”. Did you know that this is the very first time we are told in the Bible that the church met to worship on Sunday? Scripture will come to refer to the first day of the week, or Sunday, as “the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10). In honor of the resurrection of Christ, the church began to worship together on the first day of the week. It was a day that they set aside as special.

Now, understand that the Romans and Greeks did not have a day of rest; did not keep a sabbath. In fact, the Roman author Seneca scoffed at the Jews and derided them for wasting time by resting one day out of every seven. The Roman and Greek empires were at full throttle seven days a week.

However, as you know, God Himself rested on the seventh day after creating all there was in six days. And, He Himself ordained the seventh day as a day of holy rest for Israel. In fact, it happens to be one of the Ten Commandments, associated with creation.

Five reasons it was not wrong to worship on the first day of the week

So, is Paul, and are the other believers, wrong for gathering for worship on the first day instead of the seventh? Was he wrong to ignore the synagogue and worship in a home instead? *No*. Let me give five reasons this was not wrong.

1. While God modeled a day of rest on the sabbath, the Saturday sabbath was given to Israel as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the sabbath was associated with the old covenant. Sunday became associated with the New Covenant. (Exodus 31:16-17; Ezekiel 20:12)
2. Even when the Mosaic covenant was in place, the surrounding Gentile nations were never commanded or condemned in regards to sabbath keeping. This gives a further evidence that the sabbath was for Israel only.
3. The Jerusalem Council which met, as we are told in Acts, chapter 15, did not require the Gentile believers to keep the sabbath.
4. There is no command in the New Testament for Christians to observe the sabbath. In fact, the example of the early church is clearly given to worship on the Lord’s day. (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2) One author put it this way:

The sabbath was associated with the first creation; Sunday is associated with the new creation. The sabbath was based upon the law, Sunday is based upon grace. The sabbath was a commitment to physical rest; Sunday became a commitment to spiritual rest.ⁱ

5. The significant events of the New Testament church revolve around Sunday. On Sunday:

- Christ arose (Matthew 28:1);
- the Holy Spirit descended (the day of Pentecost is the day after the seventh sabbath, or the fiftieth day, which is Sunday) (Acts 2);
- the first New Testament sermon was preached, and the first believer's baptisms took place (Acts 2);
- the believers came to break bread (Acts 20:7);
- the believers gave to God their offerings (I Corinthians 16:2).

The sabbath has been set aside. Every day can be a day of worship, and especially, as we observe in scripture, this day we call the Lord's day.

In the second century, a church leader named Justin Martyr described how Christians of his day worshiped. He wrote:

On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits . . . Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.ⁱⁱ

So, by the time of Acts, chapter 20, Sunday is the significant day of collective worship. And this particular Sunday happens to be around the time we celebrate as Easter, the anniversary of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

What happens?

With all that in mind, what occurs in this gathering will become an incredible illustration of Christ's resurrection power.

Notice verse 8.

There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

Notice that Luke uses the word "we" in this verse. He is an eyewitness to what is about to happen.

Continue to verse 9.

And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep . . .

(Stop here. I find it incredibly encouraging that someone fell asleep, even when Paul was preaching. I just wanted to say that – you can go back to sleep now! By the way, it is better to fall asleep in church than to come to church and never be awake.)

. . . and fell down from the third floor [the loft] and was picked up dead.

Was he really dead? Luke, the physician, says that he "was picked up dead". The Greek word used in this verse for "dead" is "nekros," which means, "a corpse". Perhaps Luke himself pronounced Eutychus dead.

Continue to verse 10.

But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him."

Paul, in the same fashion as Elijah, put his body on the young man's body and wrapped his arms around him, almost cradling him. After that, brushing himself off, I imagine he said, "Don't be troubled," or literally, "stop the commotion."

The tense of the verb indicates that the commotion had already started. The middle eastern wailing over the "nekros," the corpse, had already commenced.

Look at verses 11 and 12.

When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

Analogy From Easter At Troas

What an illustration of resurrection power! What a demonstration of the life giving power of the gospel! What an irrefutable miracle that validated the apostle and his message.

Were all these things coincidental to the text? Did these things happen by accident when they happened? No.

Passover had just ended. The Lamb had been slain. Christ had been crucified. Easter was in the air.

This event occurred on the first day of the week – the day that Jesus came back to life; the day the church set aside to celebrate life over death.

Remember, the primary theme of Paul’s preaching was the resurrection of Christ. Could he have been preaching that very truth just prior to bringing this boy back to life? Imagine this for a sermon illustration?! Imagine, “Following the preaching of the resurrection, there will be a live demonstration!”

Even more analogies could be drawn from this event. Let me discuss a few.

All mankind is in a fallen state, as Paul writes in Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

As we are told in Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 1 and 4 through 5.

And you were dead in trespasses and sins . . . But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Furthermore, Eutychus could do absolutely nothing for Paul in order to live. He could not give any money; could not promise to be a more obedient young man; could not join the church in Troas; could not be baptized; could not promise to never sleep in church again. He could only be the recipient of God’s grace through the hand of Paul. His life was a gift.

That same chapter in Ephesians goes on to say a few verses later (verses 8 and 9),

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Eutychus never goes around Troas saying, “You should have seen what I did with Paul’s help.”

Colossians, chapter 2, verses 13 and 14, declares,
When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having

forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

In other words, Christ alone did all the work necessary for salvation.

Another interesting thing to me is that Eutychus’ name means “fortunate”. And so is the person who has been made alive in Christ, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 3, they are,

Blessed . . . with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ,

Let me point out one more thing before concluding. How old was Eutychus? In verse 9 we are told he was a young man. The Greek word is “neanias,” which could refer to a man from twenty-four to forty years of age. However, in verse 12, the Greek word “pais” is used, which usually means a little boy. It is a seemingly trivial contradiction, unless you translate the word in verse 12 differently. The word “pais,” can also be used to refer to a slave. I believe Eutychus was indeed somewhere between the ages of twenty-four and forty, and that he was someone’s servant; he was a slave.

Jesus Himself said, as recorded in John, chapter 8, verses 34 and 36,

. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. . . . if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

And, in verse 32, Jesus said,

. . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

If there ever was a wonderful picture of humanity, it was Eutychus. Enslaved, fallen, dead – then the embrace of grace turns death into life; the gift of new life.

And all of this happened at Easter time – the anniversary of the resurrection of Christ and the birth of the church. It is a church built upon the truth of the one and only true Messiah who claimed and in these verses illustrated John, chapter 11, verses 25 and 26,

. . . I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. . . .

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/12/1998 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Roy Laurin, Life in Action, p. 347.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur Jr., Acts, p. 20:7-17 section.