

- We are almost 2 ½ months into our current virtual services and pandemic situation, with isolation and quarantining.
 - You guys have been amazing in the midst of this, caring for each other, meeting together, praying and generally keeping engaged with the Holy Spirit and others during this time.
 - Keep it up church – you guys are great.
 - If you're like most people though, you are a little tired of listening to, talking about or hearing all the news and opinions on the crisis.
 - I have tried to consider what might be most helpful during this time from a teaching perspective.
 - We spent the last four weeks talking about how to not waste a good crisis, whether it is this current one, or any other crisis that you might be engaged in or will face in the future.
 - I trust you found it helpful – I know I certainly did.
 - I want to take a little lighter turn for the next few weeks.
 - So I am going to examine some lesser known stories from Scripture. The stories that maybe you haven't read, or when you did, you thought, "What was that all about?"
 - We are going to dig into them and see what we can glean from them.
 - It should be fun.
 - Today we are going to look at a story about someone who fell asleep during a church service with some pretty startling results.
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- Have you ever fallen asleep in a class? Or church? Or a lecture or seminar? How about during a work meeting? While on a Zoom call? How about when driving? Or watching a movie?
 - You know how that works.
 - Maybe you had a late night the night before. Perhaps you did not sleep well or had to get up really early.
 - Maybe you haven't eaten or maybe you just ate. Maybe the room is stuffy. Or maybe what you are listening to is really boring.
 - Regardless, you begin to feel your eyes droop. You are determined to stay awake but all of a sudden you open your eyes without even knowing when you closed them.
 - You do the old head bob or jerk. Hopefully you don't drool. And if it's really bad, you might even find yourself startling yourself awake on the verge of losing your balance or having a bad accident.
 - When you speak from the front of the room, you see this constantly. Now, you are all falling asleep safely in front of computer screens. I have had numerous people come up to me after a service and explain they weren't falling asleep, they were just thinking deeply about what was being said.
 - This is not a new phenomenon. It has been happening for as long as people have had reasons to be tired.
 - Most of the time no one notices, occasionally it can be really embarrassing, and once in a while, it can actually be fatal.
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- We find this particular account as recorded by Luke (in Acts 20) and it happened with Paul. Paul, the great apostle, the leader of the early church, whose late night church service caused problems.
 - In order to understand the story better, there is some preamble that begins in the city of Ephesus.
 - Paul had spent over two years in Ephesus, building a church.

- It was an amazingly successful. There were fantastic miracles. People healed. We are told that handkerchiefs that Paul had touched were taken to sick people and they were healed.
- So many people came to follow Jesus that it began to upset the local economy. So much so that the local guilds that made idols started a massive riot.
- This seemed to be a cue of sorts, a signal to move on, because Paul decided it was time to head back to Jerusalem.
- That's where we are going to pick up the story.

1 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

- Luke is giving us details on two things. Where Paul was going and who was with him.
- During this time, it seems as though Paul was primarily occupied with getting a monetary collection he had been taking.
- The church in Jerusalem had been really suffering from famine and economic hardship, so all the churches Paul had started or was in touch with he asked for a collection that he could take to help the Christ-followers in Jerusalem.
- You couldn't do a GoFundMe page, or Venmo or paypal the money. You collected it, gave it to trustworthy people, who delivered it with a message.
- Now he is on the way with both the money and a bunch of representatives from the various churches and regions.
- You'll notice that the narrative picks up with the word "we" in v6 which shows Luke had reconnected with the group at Philippi.
- What's interesting is that as Paul is doing all this, he is speaking many encouraging words to the churches. He is fanning their faith, encouraging them that Jesus was who he said he was. That their faith was not in vain.
- So now they are in Troas where Paul spends one week. He won't stay longer because he wants to get to Jerusalem by the time the Pentecost celebration begins. This is where the story gets a little weird.

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.

- This is significant because this is one of the few places in Scripture where we get a peak into how worship had shifted in the early church. The first day of the week was Sunday.
- Jesus followers did not gather on the Sabbath any more, but in connection to Jesus resurrection, they would gather on Sunday
- We also see that they came together to "break bread." This idea encapsulates two things. One, they actually ate a meal together and two, they celebrated the Lord's supper, or communion.
- They did not do it like we often do today, but as they hung out and ate and prayed and had fun together, they would remember Jesus and his sacrifice.
- This is the backdrop that Luke is painting for the story.

Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

- They were gathering and they were going to eat together, but they just hadn't gotten to it because Paul was teaching. Since Paul was leaving and the people wanted to hear from this apostle, they were willing to listen and talk to all that Paul was saying.

- Paul had amazing experiences. He had seen God perform fantastic miracles. He had seen entire regions of Asia begin to follow Jesus.
- He is sharing stories, encouraging the people and teaching them what it meant to follow Jesus.

8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. 9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on.

- Luke, the writer, is not interested in extraneous details. He gives two details. They were meeting upstairs and he says there were many lamps.
- It indicates the people knew this was going to be a late night, they were prepared, but it also shows the environment.
- And if you've ever been in a crowded, stuffy room where lamps, in this case, lamps that burned and consumed oxygen, were burning as it got dark, you know what effect this can have on a person.
- Remember also, this was a work day. Most of those there had almost certainly already put in a full day's work before gathering to listen to Paul and eat together.
- The young man here, Eutychus, is almost certainly a teenager. He was not a stranger to the gathering. He had family and friends there. He almost certainly had met and heard Paul throughout that whole week that he had been there.
- He is sitting in the window. Maybe because he was a teenager and that was the spot he could find. Maybe because he wanted fresh air. Maybe because he was hungry and couldn't figure out why they hadn't eaten yet.
- Regardless, he is doing the nod. He is losing the battle with sleep.
- I recall teaching one Sunday morning when a young man, probably about 15 yrs old, who was sitting in the front row during the service fell asleep. No big deal, he just laid down on the chairs . . . until he started snoring loudly.
- Embarrassing, but hardly fatal. For Eutychus, it was different.

When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.

- He probably should have picked a different seat.
- Remember, Luke, the one writing this, is a doctor. Eutychus did not just pass out, or get knocked unconscious. He was dead. Finished.

10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"

- Understandably, pandemonium broke out. People rushed down downstairs. Paul himself, reacted quickly. He ran downstairs and what he did was amazing.
- He didn't just stand there and get someone to call 911. He basically laid himself out on the ground right on top of the man and grabbed him.
- Paul plainly expected a miracle, and it came.
- Relax everyone. Don't freak out. Calm down. He's alive! And he was.
- Resurrected from the dead right in front of their eyes.
- I can't even imagine the chaos, the tears, then the amazement, and then more tears. I wonder if there were those who were so slow to get down the stairs they missed it all.
- Honestly, it's what happens next to me that is amazing.
- If this happened to us, we might conclude that we should call it a night. People would go home, get some sleep.
- Instead . . .

11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.

- Paul's response. OK, people, it's time to actually get to the food, to celebrate the Lord's supper, have a meal, and then let's settle because I have a lot more to talk with you about.

12 *The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

- I'll bet they were.
- OK, fascinating story. Funny in some ways. Amazing in others.
- But why is this here? What are we supposed to glean from this story.
- Pastors have used this for years to joke about how you shouldn't fall asleep in church.
- Churchgoers have pointed to this to show why preachers shouldn't be long winded.
- On a more serious note, many use this passage as a call to not "fall away" or abandon church. They use it to guilt people into being better and more faithful attendees of church and to stay connected to the church.
- We may never know for sure what Luke had in mind as he wrote this for the early church, but let me highlight a couple.
- I think this was both a reminder and an encouragement.
- First, the reminder. Luke wants his readers to stay engaged in community and the life of the church, not getting distracted by the world around them.
- Here's why I say this.
- Luke himself has talked about falling several times in his writings.
- Luke is the only gospel writer who talked about the disciples falling asleep when Jesus was transfigured in front of the Peter, James and John. In this momentous occasion, they were sleepy despite being invited by Jesus to be alone with him.
- The most famous is the disciples falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed just before his death.
- Jesus used sleep in his parables to indicate lack of awareness or preparedness.
- Luke is not singling out Eutychus as someone bad or good, but almost an object lesson.
- The church was expanding. People were coming to Jesus. Yet there were many obstacles. Opposition. Distraction. Things that would pull people away from God and the church.
- Luke was giving a reminder of the need to intentionally lean into God.
- The other thing Luke was doing was encouraging his readers with hope because of the grace of God.
- Remember the context. Paul had just spent years planting churches. Preaching about Jesus and his resurrection. He was coming back to encourage and care for the church in Jerusalem.
- Three times in these 12 verses the same word is used about encouragement and comfort coming from Paul to those in the church. How were they comforted and encouraged?
- They were gathered in an upper room, which was common, but where else have we seen this? The last supper. Right after Jesus died before they knew he had risen, they gathered in an upper room. After Jesus went to heaven, the church gathered in an upper room to eat, pray and wait on God. Then Pentecost happened, the Spirit was poured out, and they went out to share Jesus.
- So consider the timing of the story. This event occurred right after the Passover and before Pentecost. Paul himself was heading to Jerusalem where persecution and arrest were waiting, just like Jesus did. Hmmm . . .
- The church itself celebrated communion, the death and resurrection of Jesus, right after this young man died and was brought back to life. I bet many of the people there never celebrated another communion like that one.
- At the end of the night, the family took Eutychus home, greatly comforted and encouraged because he was alive again. What could have been sorrowful, was not. What should have been a disaster, was not. Just like the church was encouraged and comforted that the Savior they followed was alive again and with them.

- For all the people that were there, when they told this story later, what was their focus.
- I am sure that Paul shared much that night from a teaching perspective that was amazing. Theology. Scriptural study. Stories and testimonies.
- But I wonder when people told the story, the thing they remembered most was what God had done.
- The raising of this young man from the dead was a tremendous picture of what Jesus had done already.
- He had died. He had fallen out of favor with God and taken our disgrace on purpose.
- He had come back to life so that we have the promise that this life is not all there is.
- We can be encouraged and comforted by the presence of a Savior that is alive and walks with you through everything you are going through.
- And, we can have hope that death is not the end. God has redeemed us and the world through his son.
- We have his presence, direction and encouragement in this life, and the hope for an eternity of joy and purpose in the next. All because of Jesus.
- And so it behooves us to stay vigilant and not forget our great purpose and our great hope.
- I wonder whatever happened to Eutychus?
- Do you know what his name means? Eutychus means “fortunate” or “lucky.”
- I wonder if that took on a whole new meaning in his life and for the people that were there that night forever after.
- For us, what a great story to remind us that we are truly fortunate people. People with hope. And for a world that is falling asleep without it, people with a message of hope and comfort.
- Let’s keep our minds and our mission fixed on him.