



God is the God of Life

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 20:1-12

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In what is becoming sort of a running thread over the last few weeks in the Book of Acts, this text that we are looking at is kind of strange – not because it is hard to understand but because Luke tells us so very little about the miracle of raising a young man from the dead. Raising someone from the dead is no small feat. It is impossible apart from the power of God, but Luke mentions the raising of Eutychus from the dead without a great deal of fanfare. He does not give a long description of how it was that Paul raised Eutychus. He gives no extensive instruction about it, so it is left to us to think long and hard about why he includes this story at all. I mean, he skips over much other material that he could have included. The first six verses that talk about Paul's latest road trip have a lot of background to them, the writing of some of his letters and his dealings with some of the issues in the Corinthian church as just as an example, but Luke doesn't talk about that at all.

Compounding the problem is that this story of Eutychus has historically been treated as a sort of humorous tale, good for a few laughs maybe but not very important in the big scheme of things. Congregations, of course, will use this as a proof text to declare why preachers shouldn't preach very long sermons and if they do, they better have the power to raise the dead. Preachers will use this text as a warning to never fall asleep in church or you might die. And it true that if you fall asleep this morning during the sermon, and fall out of the pew and break your neck, you are pretty much out of luck because I'm not an apostle and won't be able to raise you from the dead. So stay awake. Some preachers will even use this as a comfort in being boring and a human sleeping pill because if people could fall asleep on Paul, well, they will fall asleep on anyone. But those approaches to this story, I think, miss the whole point. I do think that there are some thought provoking things in this text that may not be immediately obvious but are nonetheless very much worth our consideration. So let's pick this up in verse 1 and start working our way through the text this morning.

“After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.” (Acts 20:1–2, ESV) After the riot in Ephesus, which we looked at last week, cooled off, Paul determined that it was time for him to take his leave of the church there and get on the road back toward Jerusalem. Before he left, however, Paul sent for the church that had been formed there through the bold preaching of the Gospel and authenticated by the marvelous power of God, and encouraged them all before leaving for Macedonia. Now I want for us to take note of that word “encouraging” or in verse 2, “encouragement” and then in verse 12 “comforted.” These words all come from the same root “parakaleo” – a multifaceted word that means to “come alongside of, to call someone to something, to beseech, to exhort, to comfort.” This rich word gives us great insight into the ministry of Paul. In other words, Paul functioned, as a preacher and as an evangelist, as representative of Jesus Christ and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit – as an extension or an instrument, if you will, of the ministry of Jesus Christ as a vessel of the Holy Spirit. Paul was a vessel for the work of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in John 14, he said these words: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16–17, ESV) That word helper is the word “paraclete.” Notice what Jesus says here. The Father will send another helper – that is a helper that is like Jesus, a Helper of the same kind is the idea – one who would apply the gospel work that Christ had accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection – the salvation giving, redemption accomplishing, death-destroying, sin-killing, Satan-defeating work of Jesus. He would apply that work to the hearts and the lives of Christ’s people. That was the spirit of Paul’s ministry.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, as an instrument of God, Paul’s ministry was that of coming alongside of the church, coming alongside of God’s people, and calling them to consecration to Christ, calling sinners to saving faith in Christ, and calling Christians to full surrender to Jesus as Lord. His ministry was to beseech God’s people “by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1–2, ESV) His ministry was to beseech God’s people to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1–3, ESV)

Paul's ministry, in the Spirit of the Lord, was to exhort the flock to faithfulness by rebuking sin and apathy and urging holiness, Christ-likeness and faithfulness. He exhorted them by rebuking wrong thoughts, sinful actions, and false doctrine. He encouraged the flock with the promises of the gospel – the full forgiveness of sins, the adoption as sons and daughters, the indwelling and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, the truth that sin no longer has dominion over the people of God, that we are no longer children of wrath but children of God, that Christ will not leave us nor forsake us, that God is for us in our growth in Christ and that His discipline is for our God, that Christ will come again in glory to receive His people to Himself, that our inheritance in heaven is secure, and that those who truly love Christ will endure by the power of the Holy Spirit to the end. As Paul said in Romans 8: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:31–35, ESV) And of course, the answer to that question is "Nothing."

Beloved, let me say that this is true gospel encouragement – not empty flattery, not human psychology, not puffing up people's self-esteem, not making much of ourselves, but making much of Christ, always Christ. That is true gospel encouragement. It is what every preacher should seek to give and what every congregation should long to receive. I need someone, you need someone, we need someone to remind us continually of the glory and supremacy of Jesus, to point us away from ourselves to the glorious Christ, and then having found our life and joy in Christ, to exhort us to be the instruments of change and bold love, and faithful ministry of His gospel to a world that is entertaining and deceiving itself to death, searching for wholeness and life that can only be found in Christ. That's what Paul did. He did it in Ephesus and then he did it on a quick tour of Macedonia before coming to Greece. Verse 3 continues...

"There 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. Sopater 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. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but 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." (Acts 20:3–6, ESV)

Let me just make a few comments about this, but not many, because Luke doesn't. He is more concerned to give us an overview of Paul's travel itinerary. He stayed in Greece for three months, during the winter when ocean travel was too dangerous, and most of it in Corinth dealing with the issues in the church there – some of which were very serious. It's there that he writes the masterful and glorious book of Romans, though Luke doesn't mention it.

And then when Spring came, desiring to go to Jerusalem by way of sea travel to Syria, Paul decided instead to take the long way home back through Macedonia which would eventually take him to Troas. The reason was simple. He found out about a Jewish plan to kill him during the sea voyage to Syria, probably by throwing him overboard.

Luke also includes for us a list of the entourage that was with Paul. Why are all these guys with Paul? Well, it's not because he is a superstar – he's no Justin Bieber – for that matter I can't figure out why Justin Bieber rates an entourage – it is because these men are accompanying Paul as representatives of the Gentile churches that had given to the relief effort for the Jerusalem church. Paul wanted the church in Jerusalem and the Gentile churches in Macedonia to put a face with the offering and a face with the need, to encourage real community and unity between them all. A side benefit, of course, was that Paul would be able to do with these men what he would later exhort Timothy to do when he wrote: "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2, ESV)

Apparently, the entire group left Corinth together for Philippi before Paul sent them on ahead to Troas while Luke and Paul stayed in Philippi to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Passover – really with the focus on the death and resurrection of Christ. From there they went to Troas, to stay with the church there and to worship with them on the Lord's Day.

Now before we actually look at that worship service, I want to just point something out. Paul and the brothers, notice now, stayed there for seven days in order to be able to worship with them. Why is that significant? Here's why. I want you to see that Paul was not able to get the whole church together during the week and meet with them and impart words of grace to them and that tells us something about the life of the church there. This was a church that was scattered throughout the city. They didn't live together in a great commune. Theirs was not a

monastic life where they gathered themselves away from the world. No, this was a church that lived their lives in the same way as we do – at home, at work, in the world. Now, it is not that they didn't fellowship with one another during the week, and this is not an argument against Wednesday night church – that's not the point. But the pattern was this – they gathered corporately as a whole on the Lord's Day and during the week, they lived as we do – serving Christ where they were, witnessing to others about Christ and about the salvation that is found in Him alone, raising their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord, and making an impact where they were for the Kingdom of Christ. They worshipped and exalted Christ on the Lord's Day, drawing strength from corporate fellowship in the Lord, drawing life from the preaching of the Word, and then they expended themselves for Christ during the week. With that as a background, let's look at these last few verses.

“On 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.” (Acts 20:7, ESV) This is the first place where we see that the corporate worship of the church was on Sunday – the first day of the week. It is significant in this fact, that that the church made a complete break with the pattern of Jewish worship. The Sabbath was no longer the seventh day of the week – Saturday, but the first day – Sunday. And the reason is obvious; it was on that day that Christ rose from the dead, proving that He is the Son of God, proving that the salvation that He accomplished on the cross was true and complete. It has been the pattern ever since.

Now, that is important to understand for this reason. In those days, Sunday was a workday. So the corporate worship of the body did not take place until after the workday was over, probably beginning around 6 pm or so. That is important to keep in mind as we continue in this story.

One other thing sticks out here and we need to see it. There are two things that Luke highlights about this time of worship, two things – the breaking of bread – that's the Lord's Supper -- and the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. That is not to say that they didn't pray or sing, or give their tithes and offerings – not at all. But what are foremost in view here is Paul's teaching and the sharing of the Lord's Supper.

Luke is purposeful in highlighting these two aspects of the corporate worship of God's people and it tells us something about the focus of the church at Troas. The focus of the church was not the music, not entertainment, not socializing, not practical life lessons in a non-threatening environment, not the things that the modern church so often advertises. The focus of the gathering was the Lord's Supper and the preaching of the Word – that is how the life of the church is sustained. The focus when the church came together in worship was first, the preaching of the Word. Paul does that before anything else. He preached for hours, maybe six or more, expositing the good news, teaching through the Scriptures -- preaching primarily the work of Christ, the significance of his death, burial and resurrection and the blessings that flow from what He has done for His people, the ministry of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ permanently, the privileges of prayer, the responsibilities of Christ's disciples – all of the things that we read in His NT letters to the churches. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:3–14, ESV)

And then the focus was on the Lord's Supper – and that tells us that the heart of their worship was firmly rooted in that which the table represents – Christ crucified, His body broken, His blood poured out for our redemption, His promise to return for His people and to share in the feast of eternal fellowship with His church, His grace and mercy to reconcile rebels and sinners to the Holy God and to one another through enduring on our behalf the just wrath of God, the promise to give us a place at the table of God not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done in our place, the promise of enduring fellowship with us even as we walk through life in this earth looking to the life to come. It points to Christ as our Great Shepherd so eloquently expressed in Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in

paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:1–6, ESV) That, and more, is what this table represents.

These two things were the primary focus of the church at Troas when they came together to worship. And I have to tell you, as it regards the table, I am convicted that as we read this text that perhaps we do not celebrate the table as often as we should and I am going to talk to the elders about this. I remember being taught in seminary that if we celebrated the table too often that it would grow stale and commonplace. I'm not so sure about that. In fact, I suspect that the opposite is true – that if we celebrated the table more often than we do that it may focus our hearts more and more upon what Christ has done, that it would give us a greater and deeper appreciation of the glory of our Lord and the grace that we find in Him, and that it would grow in our hearts a greater longing for the glorious gathering of the marriage supper of the Lamb, in the presence and joy of our King Jesus. That aside, let's look at what happens.

"There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, – his name means "Lucky or Fortunate" by the way -- 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." (Acts 20:8–9, ESV) Why the mention of the lamps by Luke. Well, he is setting the scene. They are in an upper room, not much ventilation, and there are lamps there – torches that eat up oxygen in order to burn, making the air even stuffer than usual.

So this boy – and that is what he is – somewhere between the ages of 8 to 14, moved toward an open window to try to stay awake, somewhere where there is air flow. But try as he might, he just can't do it. It was past his bedtime for sure. And the idea that the Greek phrases are communicating is that he is fighting sleep, trying to stay awake, and he just can't do it, as hard as he tries. He falls asleep and then, shockingly, he falls to his death. Talk about putting a damper on things! This is horrific. In the midst of preaching, while Paul is extolling Christ and the glories of the new life in Him, a boy falls to His death. I can't imagine how that would have shaken the church, how it would have broken their hearts, how it could have stolen the joy from this fledgling body of believers. Thankfully we will never know what may have happened.

“But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.”” (Acts 20:10, ESV) Without any fanfare, Paul went down to the boy’s broken body, bent over his lifeless form, scooped him into his arms and by the power of the Holy Spirit given to him, raises this boy from the dead. Then immediately we read:

“And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.” (Acts 20:11–12, ESV) Having an amazing physical illustration to use of the power of God to raise the dead to life, Paul shares in the Lord’s Supper with the church, and then talked with them – more informally this time – until morning and then left. The church departed too, with the boy now living who had been dead, and they left not a little comforted – there’s that word again that we saw at the outset – parakaleo – exhorted, encouraged, called to something greater, comforted.

How so? Not just in the fact that this boy was no longer dead – that is part of it no doubt, but there is something more. The church left exhorted, encouraged, comforted, and called to something greater because they knew, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that their faith was real. This death and resuscitation of Eutychus, in reality, was a grace gift from God to prove the reality of their faith. Their faith which was sustained week after week as they gathered to hear the Word preached and to be reminded of all that Christ had done at the Lord’s Table, receiving grace upon grace – was absolutely true. They were really held by the powerful hand of God. And not just any God but the God who gives life.

What a picture of the life-giving power of God this would forever be to church in Troas. The gospel of Christ is more powerful than death – more powerful than physical, spiritual, or emotional death. God is the God of life. He gives life, recreates life, restores life, resurrects unto life. God has conquered sin, death, and hell because He is the God of Life. He conquers death in every realm – in the soul, in the heart, in the mind, in the home, in relationships, in the church – everywhere -- God gives life. Nothing is beyond His life giving power. That is the message of Eutychus’ death and resurrection.

God gives life and the way He does it is through His Son. More than a prophet, more than a teacher, more than a miracle worker, more than a moral example, more than a mere man. Jesus is the Son of the Living God, God in flesh. He took our sin upon himself on the cross. He paid the price for our disobedience. He endured the death that we deserve. And by doing that, He has forgiven our sin; He has taken away our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. He has made us to be at peace with God. Jesus Christ the Son of God has given us eternal life – now and in the future. He died for our justification and God raised him to new life that we might live forever. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is what Paul preached and it is what we remember and celebrate and find our life in around this Lord’s Table where we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26, ESV) and the life that we have in Him because of His great love to us. God is the God of Life.

It was the gospel then and it is the gospel now. To God be the glory!

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