

Eutychus Raised from the Dead

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 20 of acts page 1119 i'll just read that passage from verse 7 to verse 12 once again we're in troas which is on the coast just across the sea from philippi and we are in church and it's late and the church service has gone on for ages and here's what happened 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 there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered and 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 but paul went down and bent over him and taking him up in his arms he said do not be alarmed for his life is in him and when paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten he conversed with him a long time until daybreak and so departed and they took the youth away alive and were not a little comforted this chapter like every other chapter in the bible is hugely important to us not least because it gives us some fascinating information some useful information about how the early church lived what they did when they worshipped how they worshipped and if you stop for a moment and if you dissect some of the details you analyze some of the details you you come up with a picture or at least uh uh it may not be that precise but it is a picture in any case of how the early church would have met first of all they met on the lord's day and that goes back of course to the day that jesus rose from the dead why is it that we meet on a sunday where does sunday originate from why do we call it the lord's day some people call it the christian sabbath it's the first day of the week and it's the day that the church traditionally meets together for worship you'll find that all over the world the church wherever you find the church they'll meet today on the lord's day the first day of the week and the reason is because it is according to the new testament from the day that jesus rose from the dead he rose on the first day of the week and that day the disciples met together and they met together again seven days later so that set the pattern and it's very clear from the new testament that the pattern went on and on so that the first day of the week was the day that was set aside for the church to come together and we in a reformed tradition we believe that that was also the christian sabbath that the seventh day of the week the sabbath in the old testament gave way to the first day of the week in the new testament and so today we call this a christian sabbath although i prefer personally to call it the lord's day because in actual fact you don't find reference to in the bible in the new testament to the current i'm not saying it's not the christian sabbath i prefer to call it the lord's day but they were meeting clearly on the lord's day according to this pattern that had already been

established on on that day and it was a pattern that we find in other places in the new testament first corinthians chapter 16 and verse 2 for example it says on the first day of the week again the lord's day you're to set aside your income and they look that they celebrated the lord's supper on the lord's day the second thing it tells me is that they met in the evening now that doesn't mean they didn't meet in the morning but quite clearly here they met in the evening they may not have met in the morning we don't know but clearly on this occasion they met in the evening and of course all over the world circumstances are different you have the christian church in many parts of the world meeting twice on a sunday i think it's a good thing to meet twice on a sunday because it helps us to discipline our minds to worship god and to throughout the whole day and to see the day as being set aside for god's worship but it is also useful in that there are some people who can't get out one end of the day there are people who do shifts there are people whose work commitments require them people like nurses and doctors and police and people whose duties require them and if that's true in our culture it's even more so in other cultures i remember being in india uh many years ago before i came here and i remember uh going in i was taking the service in uh in jabalpur and the service was supposed to start at 11 o'clock in the morning and when i walked into the pulpit there was hardly anybody there there was about half a dozen people there and i knew that there were more in the congregation than half a dozen but then as the service went on and on and more and more people would come in and it wasn't just in discipline on their part the pastor told me afterwards he said that these people they have all kinds of different duties to do some of them have got animals and they've got chores and things that they can't do like we can do in the west before the service they have things that necessitate them staying away until a certain particular time now i believe it would have been the same here in troas that as they would meet together that it was it was for perhaps those who were slaves and who couldn't get away from their household until sunset when their duties were finished and only then they were able to get to worship and they would have been really thankful to come to church even if it meant staying up till midnight as it appears happened on this occasion and a person in that position is only too desperate to get as much fellowship as he possibly can you see we're so used to it familiarity breeds contempt there's no doubt about it at all if you and i were living in a culture where we were denied the privilege of coming together we would of our desks we would love coming together far more than we do in our plenty and in our affluence and wealth and freedom that we have in this country i remember uh again oh many many years ago we were in romania many of you have been to romania we were in romania many years ago and we were invited to this wedding and this wedding was to take place on a saturday afternoon and we were invited there and it took ages i think we were there for about three hours and it was explained to us afterwards that the reason that they took so long was because in the communist times that this was the

only chance that christians could get together it was one of the only things that christians were allowed to do was to gather together for weddings so they made it a kind of a conference if you like where one speaker would get up and another speaker would get up and another speaker would get up and it would be like a sermon each time and they loved it because they were so deprived if you and i were deprived of this we would be far more eager to get to church and we would be far less complacent about it and our excuses for not coming to church would be far fewer we're so well off and maybe it may very well be that the tide will change one day in our culture we may very well have to face the kind of opposition that our brothers and sisters in other countries have had to face in times past and even in the present moment i wonder what it would be i wonder how it would be for us if we were denied the privilege of coming together if we couldn't come together it was illegal for us as it was on on in many parts of the of the roman empire and in in some in some particular eras and the next thing it tells us that the dominant element we don't know anything about their singing i'm not saying they didn't sing we don't know anything about the reading of the word we don't know anything about the form of service the form of worship that they would use don't know anything about that but what we do know is that the dominant element in their pre in their service was the preaching of the word here we read it uh to break bread now we know that they broke bread and we know that they broke bread every lord's day and that's why many christians all over the world they'll insist that according to the new testament pattern that we should be having communion every sunday john calvin believed in that and he tried to get it in geneva but it wasn't allowed he wasn't allowed it but i don't want to go into that argument but it is a it is quite clear from the new testament that they broke bread every single lord's day but the dominant element in their service was that paul talked with them intending to depart and he prolonged his speech until midnight and what we find the words there suggest that it wasn't just him preaching but there appeared to be a kind of fellowship at the same time now i don't know whether it was divided as we do into a service a more formal service where there was preaching and then it would be discussion afterwards but there were certainly the two things there was the preaching and then there was also the questions and answers something similar perhaps to what we've started reading so what we've reopened now in a monthly fellowship something similar to what we do in the cabaret something similar to what's being started all over the island christianity explored there's nothing new about any of those things it is all based on the new testament where where people gather together and they get a chance to ask and answer questions and perhaps that is why these occasions have been so incredibly helpful to those who are seeking the lord because they get the opportunity to ask questions and to answer and this is the kind of situation that was going on it's also clear that they took their families to church this young man wouldn't have been here if it hadn't been for his family i don't know whether he was a slave or whether he had parents or but it was obvious that people came as families and once again can i please encourage you to take your families to church i know you do i mean this is not a criticism i'm just giving you so much encouragement because because sometimes you're

so conscious of your kids perhaps when they're young and they're restless and they they they you feel that they're making a noise and you feel that the minister is noticing them and you feel that there are disturbance to other people well let me tell you the minister certainly doesn't notice them and if they're a disturbance to other people well that's too bad it's too important to ignore please take them you wouldn't believe how much they pick up even at a young age and they get to see their own contemporaries people who are at school with them people their own age they get to make friends in the creche and they get to know people not just their own age but they get to know older people how balanced is that how healthy is that for them to get to know the congregation people who are christian and people who pray for them and love them and want to talk to them and they feel a sense of belonging in the church if the church is functioning as it should do they should be waking up in the morning and say yes it's sunday we want to go to church now i know that the age comes maybe where teenagers where it becomes uncool to go to church and where because the friends maybe don't go to church or have stopped going to church then the pressure is on them to stop let me ask you if you're a teenager tonight do you feel the pressure not to go to church because you feel that you're alone or because you feel that nobody else in your class and school is coming to church then please please be prepared to stand for jesus by yourself and you do the right thing don't just do what everybody else is doing you do the right thing that's how to live for the lord because if you're going to follow the lord it means that you cannot go along with the crowd it means that when that when they want to do one thing you know that that's wrong then you have to stand alone and you might as well stand you might as start now this is these are the best years of your life and learn how please learn how to stand for the lord in your life so that's why this passage is so important because it gives me so much information about the way in which the church operated at that particular time but it's also important because it reminds us of how vulnerable we are even in the most important places paul went on till midnight obviously wanted to make the most of the opportunity that he had he wanted to stay as long as he could because there were so many people asking questions and he was he had so much to tell them about the gospel there is absolutely no question about what the subject was he wasn't there to talk about politics or anthropology he wasn't there to talk about sociology he wasn't there to talk about nature or any of these he was there to talk about the gospel that was paul's business that was why they were gathered there was only one subject that they were concerned about on that occasion and that was jesus christ we preach said paul christ crucified so the subject would have been jesus and there were so many things that paul had to tell them his knowledge himself of the old testament was so vast it's likely that he would have gone back into the old testament he would have explained how the prophets and the law they they looked forward to the coming of jesus and how jesus in his coming and in his death and resurrection fulfilled the old testament some of them would have been asking him how they should live they would have been bringing moral dilemmas that they would face at that particular time how do i witness to to jesus what do i do if i'm in that situation or this situation is this wrong or is that wrong and paul would have talked them all the way through it

there were all kinds of moral problems and moral issues that they have because many of these people they would have been gentiles and they would have been they would have grown up to believe in in gods and for them the whole idea of the trinity was completely new father son and spirit what does that mean is the son less than the father is the spirit less than the son we were talking about that this morning the same questions that you and i we ask continuously we wrestle with these questions these would these men and women would have been wrestling with them as well so there was no end of subject it's not easy it's not hard to imagine how the apostle would have stayed longer and longer and longer and some of them would have been active listening to what he's saying but it's obvious that there were some who were way way up perhaps with the best will in the world even having started out listening eagerly and intently with the best will in the world we've only got a certain attention span don't we in today's world we have a very little we have a very small attention span because because we're used to sound bites and exciting images on tv and so it's actually quite hard actually can i say this the fact that you can sit for half an hour and listen to a sermon is an achievement in itself in today's world and don't please don't ever diminish that because it is so important that that hour of worship is so important to get to empower you and to encourage you and to instruct you in the way in which you live your christian life that you can't do without it this is god's word this is god speaking to us and please don't underestimate the importance of this but even so here was a young man and we read and the way in which is put in this passage is is so telling isn't it there were first of all many lamps in the upper room so that sets the scene see it's easy for us with electric light it doesn't give off much heat but if you have loads and loads of lamps they're on all burning oil then and it's a hot climate anyways a mediterranean climate and it's midnight and it's dark and the heat from the lamps is rising up to where the remote people were sitting and there's loads of people there and the body heat is it must have been roasting and it's not like here where you can turn down the the the heating and it's not like where you can open the window because if you open the window it makes it worse because it's probably about 30 degrees outside and they were all gathered packed the place was mobbed so that's the scene set there was a young man named utica sitting at the window now it's not like one of these windows was a glass there's nothing and he's sitting there carefully balanced listening to paul and drifting slowly but surely unconsciously drowsing nodding off his eyes are becoming heavier and heavier and his body is becoming heavier and heavier and he hears less and less of what the apostle is saying and even i love the way this is put i love the way this is put it just is so vivid he sank into a deep sleep as paul talked longer it's it's put there like even paul's talking paul wasn't a good preacher by the way

[20 : 23] you often think of paul as this enormously impressive presence in the pulpit that people would have flocked to hear if they had been living in this country that's not the case at all paul tells us himself that he wasn't very impressive in fact he had so many critics in corinth for example they they could some of them couldn't stand him because of that very thing he wasn't a good preacher but his substance was all there in other words if you wanted a question to be answered you brought that question to him and you knew that he was likely to know the answer to that question so that's why they were all there it wasn't there was no entertainment evangelism here and that there was there was no clever words it was simply pure word it was pure gospel and it appears that perhaps paul may have been i don't suppose he could sustain talking in various tones all night and he was going on and on and on and the poor man the poor young person he's just falling asleep that's hard isn't it you've been there i've been there i know what it's like i have every sympathy when i see that in here don't think i'm criticizing you i know how difficult it is sometimes when you've had a bad night for example i remember i remember when we had kids at first they would keep us up babies they would keep us up all night saturday i don't know what got into them on a saturday night it seemed to be 10 times worse on a saturday when you had to go to church the next day you had to get them ready and then the last thing you wanted to do was to was to have to concentrate for half an hour on what the preacher was saying and you're trying as hard as i know what it's like but nothing new about it here it is right back in the first century here is the human vulnerability trying to stay awake and to maintain your concentration when it is so difficult to do so when all the and that's why that you know there's a practice there's a few practical issues here that are raised and that's when you come to church are you in the best frame of mind now i don't i don't mean i don't mean circumstances you can't avoid like when you've got small children or when you when you haven't been able to sleep on the previous night when you're having difficulty with your health or something else but i don't understand how you can complain if you've been sitting up half the night perhaps watching telly or watching a dvd or something and then you're struggling to concentrate in church i would have to say to you if that's the case maybe you need to adjust your saturday program to take into account the importance of church on sunday you know in the olden days our forefathers saturday night was like a sunday in itself where they made an effort to prepare themselves for sunday now maybe that was a little bit legalistic maybe but maybe on the other hand they had a point maybe they just knew their own vulnerability and they knew the importance of making the most of the lord's day you'll never get out of services what you don't put in and if you come in the wrong frame of mind if you come half-heartedly being distracted by other things unprepared

well completely tired but not because of something outside your control but because of something that is sheer indiscipline i'm talking to myself i've been there i know what i'm talking about i know from my own experience how important it is i'm asking i suppose what i'm suggesting is that we have a different view of the way we approach our worship and that we approach it giving it the best that we can possibly give it of ourselves and then lo and behold you're going to get far more out of it another suggestion as to how to concentrate in church particularly when it's hot and particularly when maybe there's monotones coming from the pulpit is to take notes i see some of the young people who do that i'm not saying it's the only way to concentrate and i'm not saying you have to do it but it can be a good way especially when you're feeling tired take a notebook along and write down notes and go over it and it's amazing how when you're writing down notes how much you remember even if you remember two or three different things then you've got something out of the service particularly if you don't have a good memory but this passage also reminds me tonight of a very scary thought that you and i are only one step away from eternity right now as we sit here there is one thread that stands between us and death you would imagine that this is the safest place in the world wouldn't you listening to the gospel the way we are just now there's high i mean if you did a risk assessment about church then there wouldn't be that much to put in the paper would there wouldn't amount to much of a report i mean what do we do we sit here we listen and we go we sing that's not very risky and it was the same in here as well what's the risk in a whole bunch of people coming into a house and sitting listening to the apostle paul no danger and yet within a split second one of the congregation was dead it's really a thought isn't it the last thing that young man heard was the story of the cross and how jesus the son of god had given himself as our sacrifice for our sin and perhaps paul if he was true to form and i'm sure he was he would have been asking people he would have been pleading with people all those if you're not a follower of jesus come to faith in jesus now and perhaps that young man like many a young man and not so young and older people he would have been listening there and perhaps he would have been saying well it's a long way off death is a long way off for me i'm only at the very beginning of my life i've got so much in front of me all the opportunities and all the privileges of life i'm just i'm just beginning in my life you don't expect me to come to to faith in jesus to give my life maybe i'll do it one day when i'm older he's dead isn't that a solemn thought where does that leave us in our day of

travel cars crossing the road and how often do we hear even in our own small community of people's sudden death nobody is immune to dying nobody so i would like to think that we will realistically this evening put ourselves in the position of that young man one step away from death and the most solemn thing of all is that the last words that he has ever heard in this life are the words of the gospel but lastly this passage reminds me of the extraordinary power of god because as soon as he was picked up dead the apostle paul he ran to him and he picked him up and something happened i don't know what happened it wasn't the power of the apostle paul he was the instrument through which this miracle took place but miraculously the man came to life again and that means that it was god that gave his life back to him now that happens a few times in the new testament doesn't happen very often but it happens a few times in the new testament and every time it happens there is one message and that is that god gives life this miracle is a kind of a picture an illustration an example of the way in which god gives life in the gospel here is paul he's talking about the grace of god the love of god and sending jesus into the world the importance of coming to faith in jesus christ and the poor man sinks into a sleep and he drops down dead and then god in his grace he gives his life back to him isn't that a picture of all of us every time a person comes to faith in jesus as a resurrection every time a person begins to follow jesus every time a person is born again that person is brought to newness of life it's a miracle just like here where god gives new life to you and god can do that again and again and again he can do it tonight and whilst nobody here is physically dead the bible tells us that if we are not following jesus we are dead in trespasses and sins and that's perhaps the reason why there's a voice within you just resisting everything that's being said this evening but god can change that he can bring life into a death and he can raise you up into newness of life paul said if anyone is in christ he is a new creation the old has gone and behold he says all things have become new i would love to think this evening that even in reading this little passage and in seeing once again the extraordinary miracle working power of god in raising this young man by his grace and his power that we will see ourselves and what god can do for us in jesus christ

may we do so by coming to him and by trusting in him and believing in him with all our heart let's pray our father in heaven once again we come to you asking that you will that you will bless your word to us we pray lord that it will speak to every one of us this evening and pray that your word will dwell within us richly and that you will that you will equip us and and prepare us for whatever lies ahead we pray for anyone who has been listening to this this evening who like that young man has perhaps not physically but but spiritually been drifting away we ask lord that you will in your own power that you will reach that person and bring them to life once again by because you are a gracious god and you are not willing that any should perish but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth in Jesus name

Amen