

Acts Series Part 55

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 June 2011

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Sunday's rock. I bet you've never heard these two words in such close proximity. It seems a particularly strange juxtaposition of words in the context of the usual portrayal of the Scottish Presbyterian Sabbath as a day of unrelenting drudgery and endless prohibitions. But some might say, let's get real. Do Sundays really rock? Well, that is God's purpose for this special day.

He would have us call the Sabbath a delight. We've read in the prophet Isaiah how that is the manner in which this day is described by God, how we would enjoy this day as God has purposed it, a day to look forward to, a day to delight in, a day to be excited by. Sundays should rock, even for children, for kids, for teenagers. Yes, even for such. And this morning I want to introduce you to a young man, possibly a teenager, who experienced a delightful, indeed unforgettable Sunday. His name, as you've already been introduced to him, as Jonathan spoke to the children, is Eutychus. Even his name is kind of fun. It means lucky or fortunate. And we will discover that he was indeed one lucky guy, certainly one seriously blessed guy. All the action takes place on a Sunday in Troas. Troas is some 150 miles north of Ephesus, where we left Paul last Sunday. And this morning we're going to shadow Eutychus on the Sunday that is described for us in Acts chapter 20. So let's read the passage and in that way familiarize ourselves a little more with this man and what happened to him on this particular Sunday.

We'll read from the beginning of chapter 20 of Acts so that we can follow the flow of events, but we'll be concentrating our attention on the incident surrounding Eutychus that is described for us in verses 7 to 12.

But let's read from the beginning of the chapter. It's on page 1116 of our Bibles. We read from the beginning of that chapter, when the uproar had ended, that's the riot we were thinking about last Sunday morning in Ephesus. When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for his disciples and after encouraging them said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him, just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.

He was accompanied by Sopater, son of Phyrus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.

[3 : 3 4] The we there would seem to be a reference to Luke once again being party to what is going on, and so it's describing these things as a first-hand witness.

These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas, but we sailed from Philippi after the feast of unleavened bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people, and because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man, and put his arms around him.

Don't be alarmed, he said. He's alive. Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. The Word of God. Eutychus is presented to us here then in this passage.

We've suggested that he was a young man, possibly a teenager. It's not altogether clear how old he was. There are two words that are used to describe him. In verse 9, the word that is used is translated by young man. There you'll notice in verse 9. And then in verse 12, in our versions, we have the same English translation that people took the young man home. But it's actually a different word that is used there, and a word that is probably more accurately translated as young boy, possibly a teenager.

[5 : 29] In his early or mid-teens, that would seem a reasonable conclusion on the basis of the language that Luke uses here to describe him. That's just a detail, but just to clarify who we're talking about when we speak of Eutychus. What do I want us to get out of this Sabbath docudrama, shadowing our main man Eutychus? Well, I want us to get a glimpse of a delightful Sabbath, or more importantly, a glimpse of a young man delighting in this particular Sabbath or Lord's Day. And for what purpose, in what way will it serve us to have this glimpse provided? Well, will serve us, I trust, as an invitation that we too would similarly delight in and profit from this special day that God has given us. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Now, there are four delights of this Sunday for Eutychus that I want us to think about. And I'll mention what the four are, and then we can consider them each in turn. First of all, for Eutychus, this Sunday was a day of celebration, a day of celebration. But it was also a day of fellowship and friendship. It was, in the third place, a day of feasting on God's Word. And finally, it was a day of miraculous new life. All of these things together make this day, for Eutychus, a delightful day. Eutychus, I am sure, would be able to gleefully echo the words of Isaiah that the Sabbath was a delight for him. This Sabbath, this Lord's Day in particular, a delightful day for this young man, a day to celebrate, a day for fellowship, a day to feast on God's Word, and a day of miraculous new life. Well, let's think of these elements in turn. First of all, this Sunday was, for Eutychus, a day of celebration. What were Eutychus and all those who came together, as Luke describes it there in verse 7, on the first day of the week, what were they celebrating? Let's just read the verse. On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.

Even in these few words, in the first part of verse 7, we have hinted at, or more than hinted at, referred to, two pivotal events in God's plan of salvation that Eutychus, together with the other believers, celebrates on this day. First of all, we are told of the death of Jesus. On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. They were coming together for this purpose, to break bread. Now, this expression, as I imagine you have heard on other occasions, can refer to an ordinary meal, or it can also refer to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Most probably, on this occasion, as on other occasions, it refers to both. Both are anticipated or described by the use of this phrase. And certainly, it seems reasonable to understand it as a reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. So, Eutychus, when he makes his way to this house in Troas on this particular

Sunday, is doing so to break bread, to remember and to celebrate the death of Jesus. Now, to celebrate death may sound rather macabre. Perhaps those of us who have had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian home or in a Christian church, we're very familiar with the notion, and so it's less shocking to us. But for others, quite understandably, it would seem a strange thing that Eutychus or anybody else would celebrate death, or celebrate, in this case, the death of Jesus Christ. But of course, we know that for us as Christians, the cross, the death of Jesus Christ, stands at the very heart of the Christian message. It was on the cross that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, died in the place of sinners. It was on the cross that Jesus bore our sin, evidencing God's love and satisfying God's justice. It was on the cross that the body of Jesus was broken for Eutychus. And so, on this Sunday, in Trois, Eutychus makes his joyful way to church, to break bread and celebrate the death of his Lord.

But verse 7 also points to another pivotal event in the gospel story, not only the death of Jesus, but also the resurrection of Jesus. When are they gathering? Well, again, we notice what we've read there in verse 7, on the first day of the week, we came together to break bread, we are told.

[11 : 06] What day is this, and what is the reference to this first day of the week? Well, there is some debate, and I don't want to get into the details of it, but there is some debate as to whether we should understand this first day that is clearly referred to as running from the Saturday evening through to the Sunday evening, or simply as referring to all-day Sunday. And the debate really centers around whether Luke is using a Jewish form of timekeeping or a Roman form of timekeeping, and different views are held, and perhaps a definitive conclusion cannot be reached. It certainly was the first day. As I say, whether the first day began on Saturday evening or on Sunday morning is open to legitimate debate.

And of course, that is relevant in as much as the incident described, depending on what way you go in this debate, would have taken place on Saturday evening or on Sunday evening. Both would be possibilities, depending on what Luke is saying in these words. In as much as one is able to come to a conclusion, it would seem that the weight of evidence would favor Sunday evening. In other words, Luke is here speaking of the first day of the week as beginning on Sunday morning and closing on Sunday evening. Therefore, when in the passage we are given a description of an evening event, then it is the Sunday evening that Luke is talking about. As I say, it probably doesn't merit a great discussion. The question really, the important question for us is why are these Christians gathering on Sunday evening or in any case on the first day of the week? Well, we know the answer to that. They are doing so to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the one who died on Good Friday rose again triumphant on Resurrection

Sunday. Jesus is alive. And so, for Eutychus, for this reason, Sunday rocks. Sunday is a wonderful day. Sunday is a tremendous day. It's a day when He, together with the other believers, celebrate that His Lord is alive. Yes, He died, but on the third day He rose again triumphant. Sunday is a day of celebration. Jesus has conquered death, and as we will shortly see in this very incident, He shares His victory over death with all who put their trust in Him. And so, for Eutychus, Sunday is a day of celebration. Before we move on, we pose the question to ourselves, what about us? Is that true of us? Is Sunday for us that day of celebration, to celebrate the death of Jesus Christ, to celebrate His resurrection? But there is more.

For Eutychus, Sunday is also a day of fellowship and friendship. Eutychus does not worship alone. He gathers with God's people in Troas to enjoy this fellowship and friendship. The breaking of bread, referred to there in verse 7, as already suggested, is likely to have involved both the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and an agape meal or love feast, where the believers shared a meal together. They ate together as part of the whole gathering or experience. And I imagine that as they did so, they would be discussing the Word that had been preached or that they had discussed with, in this case, Paul or whoever it was that was responsible for the teaching. They would have, I imagine, shared experiences of the week that had passed, opportunities that they had had for service and witness. They would encourage one another, those who were downcast, those who were disheartened for one reason or another. This would be an occasion where others could bring them a word of encouragement. They would receive and give advice. They would exhort each other and, if necessary, reprove each other. I imagine the occasion also provided opportunity for them to pray together for one another. And simply, it provided an opportunity to get to know each other better and to enjoy each other's company. These are new, nascent churches. Many of those who are gathering would have not had a long-standing relationship one with another. But on these special

Lord's Day, there was that special opportunity to gather together in fellowship and in friendship, one with another. And young Eutychus, I am sure, loved these times of fellowship. He relished and enjoyed the friendship of God's people, other teenagers or young folk like himself, but also the friendship and the support and the wisdom of older believers with whom he was also able to enjoy fellowship and friendship.

[16 : 37] So, for Eutychus, Sunday was a day of fellowship and friendship. What about us? Is that true for us? If we are struggling a little with the very idea that Sunday's rock, maybe this is a missing ingredient.

If a Sunday is not for us, a day of fellowship and friendship, then we're missing out on this important element that would allow us to delight in this day as God intends. There are opportunities provided for us in a measure. Of course, we can make opportunities also, but there are opportunities.

A week Sunday, we have a congregational lunch, an agape meal, something not dissimilar to what I imagine is being described here in Troas, where we can gather around a meal to enjoy fellowship and friendship one with another. There are other opportunities, of course, not limited to this special day, the Lord's Day. The neighborhood fellowships that meet in different homes also provides this opportunity to cultivate fellowship and friendship one with another. So, for Eutychus, this Sunday was a day of celebration, but it was also a day of fellowship and friendship. But there's another aspect that I want to notice and to highlight, as I've already suggested, and it is this, that Sunday was for Eutychus a day of feasting on God's Word. Now, here we have to pause for a moment because that suggestion may seem a little strange. It may seem almost contradictory to what we know of Eutychus. Is Eutychus not this young fellow who famously fell asleep as Paul preached? And indeed he is. We've read the passage it describes for us very eloquently that this is what happened. There in verse 9 we're told that he was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. And then it continues, when he was sound asleep, well, the tragedy occurs. So, is it not rather strange to describe this young man as feasting on

God's Word? Far from feasting he was snoring. He was, it would seem, at first glance, bored out of his skull. And hence he is sound asleep. Maybe that's how we would ordinarily have read or considered this young man. But I think we can, based on the facts before us, vindicate Eutychus, at least in some measure.

And let's just notice for a moment the facts that we have in front of us. First of all, as we've already noted, he was a young lad, or so it would seem, possibly in his early teens. We don't know for sure. But he wasn't certainly a grown adult man. So, that's one thing to bear in mind before we quickly condemn him for falling asleep. That's the first thing. The second, and we have this very helpfully described by Luke, is the very room in which this gathering is taking place is, I think we can reasonably conclude, full of people. It's hot and stuffy. Indeed, the very odor of the lamps that are explicitly mentioned would have been very soporific. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting, Luke informs us helpfully. Why does he tell us that? Well, presumably in part to explain why it is that this poor young man just found it so difficult to stay awake. So, he's very young.

[20 : 22] The environment in which he is lends itself to falling asleep. The other thing to notice in terms of the facts that we have is that he is still awake at midnight. You see, we can focus so much on the fact that he falls asleep, but let's not forget that this gathering, it would seem reasonable to presume, began at sundown. Many of those who gathered would have been in a working situation where they could not have avoided working, and so it was only at the close of the day that they could have gathered for this meeting. And so, from maybe seven or so right through to midnight, young Eutychus has been awake, has been participating, has been listening to Paul as Luke informs, as Paul preached on and on.

He's awake, he's listening, possibly at the end of a long working day. But there's another fact that is, or should be understood, in Eutychus's favour. What's he doing by the window? You know, we're told that that's where he was, seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus. Now, what's he doing there? Well, again, imagine the scene. When he first arrived at the gathering, possibly he was seated elsewhere. Obviously, we don't know. But as he himself realises that sleep is threatening him, as he himself feels tired by the long day that he has had and the stuffy surroundings he is in, what does he do? Well, he does what people would do. He goes to the window, because at the window there's fresh air that will help him stay awake. He doesn't go to the window in order to fall asleep. He goes to the window to stay awake. That's his purpose. That's why he's there.

It seems perfectly reasonable to conclude. So, all of these things point in the direction of a young man who wanted to hear God's Word, a young man who delighted in feasting in God's Word, not a young man who's looking for a wee corner where he can discreetly fall asleep while others listen to the sermon.

No, I think the evidence points in another direction. Eutychus wants to hear what Paul has to say. He wants to feast on God's Word as it is explained and expounded by Paul. You see, for Eutychus, Sunday is a special day when he has the opportunity to spend serious time in and under the Word of God, to hear God speak to him, to hear God speak to Eutychus. And so, Sunday is special because in a special way he has this opportunity. Now, this particular Sunday was extra special, I suppose, because Paul was there and he was, as we read, the following day to depart. And so, there would have been particular excitement surrounding this Sunday. But of course, every Sunday provided this opportunity for Eutychus.

Now, while we stress Eutychus' enthusiasm and desire to hear the Word of God, we do recognize that there was an onus on Paul to grip his audience, to make it interesting for them that they would stay alert and awake and take profit from what was being taught. And we can be sure that Paul does so. And just as a brief aside, we maybe notice two ways in which Paul would have secured the concentration and the attention of his audience, certainly the content of what he had to say. There's a little detail that I just throw out for you to think about that maybe gives you an insight on just how thrilling and gripping Paul's address would have been. In the passage that we've read, in the first few verses of chapter 20, there's reference to three months that Paul spent in Greece. We can notice there in verse 2 of chapter 20, he traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people and finally arrived in Greece where he stayed three months. Now, I don't have the time to, to, what shall I say, substantiate what I'm going to say, but there seems very good reason to believe that it was during those three months in Greece that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. So, just imagine the scene. Paul has just written this amazing letter to the Romans, rich in doctrinal profundity, just this amazing letter that he has conceived and by inspiration of God has written.

[25 : 02] And then he arrives in Troas and is preaching. You can just imagine how that letter he has just written, I am sure, would have been very significant in the content of what he preaches to Eutychus and his friends there. What a privilege for these Christians in Troas that this apostle who's just written this amazing letter is now able to preach to them. And no wonder he goes on and on. And so, the content was gripping. The content was something that they were hanging on his every word. But the manner also, the manner in which Paul presents his material, different verbs are used in the passage.

And one of the verbs used that repeats itself in verse 7 and verse 9, in English it's translated that Paul spoke or Paul talked, is a Greek word, and I'll mention what it is because we'll see a connection with an English word. It's a Greek word or verb, a dialogami. Dialogami. Now you don't need to be a linguist to see the connection with an English word, dialogue. And certainly this verb, though it can be used to speak of discourse, can also be used to speak of a more interactive form of communication, a dialogue if you wish. And so, it would seem that Paul, in the manner of his presentation, didn't limit himself to some monologue where those present simply had to listen silently to everything that was being said. There would have been discussion, a question and answers. I wonder if Eutychus participated. Maybe as a young man, as a young boy, he felt it wasn't for him to ask questions, but he was certainly listening to others as questions were asked and answers were given.

Well, we could go on, and there is, I recognize, a measure of speculation in this. But I think it is reasonable to conclude that for Eutychus, Sunday was a special day because it was a day to feast on God's Word. Well, again, the question comes to us, is that true of us? Do we feast on God's Word?

Have we perhaps lost our appetite? Are we on a diet? Or are we, like Eutychus, feasting on God's Word? Sundays will rock in the measure that we enjoy the feast. If we don't enjoy the feast, then we won't enjoy the day. And I do reflect if the manner of Paul's delivery that we've suggested, whether we are missing a trick as we would rigidly limit ourselves to the one-man monologue at both of our Sunday services. Maybe that's something where we are not taking the advice and the wisdom of Paul in the manner of his delivery. But we move on. Finally, for Eutychus, Sunday was not only a day of celebration, celebrating the death and resurrection of his Lord, not only a day of fellowship and friendship, not only a day of feasting on God's Word, but also a day of miraculous new life.

Now, we know the story. Eutychus is interested in what Paul is saying, but he can only take so much. And so, eventually, and I stress eventually, he does indeed sink into a deep sleep, as it is described for us there in verse 9. And this is, as we know, a prelude to disaster.

[28 : 35] He falls from the second floor window to the ground below. And you can imagine the commotion. Some who are near the window, a stair from the offending window down to the ground below.

There's darkness, and yet they're trying to establish, is there any movement? Is there any life left in this body that has landed on the ground below? Others who are perhaps nearer the exit of the room rush down to where Eutychus has fallen and surround him and gather around him to see if there are any signs of life. But the somber reality is that before them is a lifeless corpse, for Eutychus is dead. Some have questioned whether he was indeed dead. Maybe he was just unconscious.

Indeed, Paul in verse 10 declares very confidently he's alive. Was he actually dead? Well, certainly the language that is used. And significantly also the man who uses the language leaves us in no doubt. It is Luke who is giving us this account, the physician Luke. And Luke very carefully chooses his language and describes how Eutychus was picked up dead. The boy is dead. The fall has killed him.

And so when Paul, in the following verse as we read, goes down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him, don't be alarmed. He said, he's alive. He is able to say this because he is now alive. He had been dead. But as Paul embraces him, and as Paul by the power of God is able to infuse into this lifeless corpse, new life, so he is able to now declare he's alive. The boy was dead, but now he is alive.

Now this is a remarkable turn of events. It's difficult to overstate what has happened. You can't really hype up a resurrection. It's as remarkable as it gets. This dead man has been brought to life, and yet there follows what is arguably something even more remarkable. And it's the way in which Paul, following this incident, very matter-of-factly, or certainly that's the way it strikes me, heads back up the stairs and continues the service. There in verse 11, then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. You can almost imagine Paul arriving back in the upper room and saying to the gathered audience, now, where were we? And continuing with the service. It's an amazing thing. This young man who has died has come back to life again. And Paul carries on with the service that had begun. Well, you can be sure of this, that his audience are now wide awake. Because Eutychus wasn't the only one that was either sleeping or very, very drowsy, but now none of them are drowsy. They are all wide, wide awake. They are in awe of what has happened. How can it be? And as Paul proceeds to break bread with them, he is able to explain how it can be as he presents to them the death of Jesus as

[32 : 03] God's appointed means of conquering death. And what better illustration of the truth that he is presenting than the young Eutychus. He was some visual aid for Paul as he continued to teach his gathered audience. Eutychus, a symbol of new life in Christ, a foretaste of the physical resurrection of Christ. And he was a symbol of the physical resurrection of the Holy Spirit. And he was a symbol of the physical resurrection of the Holy Spirit. And he was a symbol of the life of the Holy Spirit.

A Sunday of miraculous new life. And I wonder if Eutychus was the only one to experience new life in Troas that Sunday night. Might there not have been, and we don't know, but might there not have been among those gathered one or two or more who were not believers as they gathered in that place that day.

But they hear the word preached. They witness the life-giving power of God as Eutychus is raised from the dead. And by the Spirit of God, they too are granted new life as they confess their sins and put their trust in Jesus. New life perhaps not only for Eutychus on that Sunday in Troas. Well, all this is very dramatic, but as we would draw lessons or draw comparisons, do we not have to draw a line?

Today we can and should imagine and indeed experience a Sunday of celebration. We can say, yes, well, that's something we can do. Eutychus celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We can do the same. Eutychus celebrated fellowship and friendship. Well, that's something we can do also. Eutychus, feasted on God's Word. Well, that's something we can do also. But miraculous new life, is there not a line to be drawn here? We live in different times. Well, yes and no. Certainly, it is true that we do not expect physical corpses coming to life in Bon Accord of a Sunday.

[34 : 11] But we can and we must expect miraculous new life as sinners are born again to new life by the Spirit of God. I wonder if we have that expectation. And as we ponder on whether we do have that expectation, I wonder, and again, I am willing to concede that I present this simply as the musings of the preacher. I wonder, are the four aspects of this great Sunday for Eutychus and the believers in Troas unconnected one with another? Let me explain. Very particularly, is there a connection between the fourth aspect of this amazing Sunday in Troas and the preceding three? Indeed, is there even possibly a causal connection? What I'm saying is this, miraculous new life in Troas, was it in great measure because in Troas there were believers who celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus, because in this gathering there were believers who were enjoying fellowship and friendship and cultivating it one with another, because in Troas there were believers feasting in God's Word. And so, in such a place, God is pleased to grant the miracle of new life. Might there not be a connection between these things?

Now, of course, we recognize God's sovereign power, and in the most unlikely of congregations, God can grant new life, and praise be to His name. But is it not His ordinary way of working, that where God's people celebrate their Lord, where God's people celebrate one another, where God's people feast on His Word, who feast on His Word in such a place, in such a place, God is pleased by His Spirit to grant miraculous new life of a Sunday. I leave that for your consideration.

Sunday's rock, or to put it a little more traditionally, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us pray.