

Awake, O Sleeper
Acts 20:1-16

Intro

One activity that has enjoyed a rich history in the church of Jesus Christ is falling asleep during the sermon. Sleeping in church - from my vantage point I see it all. You think 40 minutes is a long time?

At the planting of the first church in Woburn, Massachusetts, the Rev. Mr. Symmes showed his godliness and endurance (and proved that of his parishioners also) by preaching between four and five hours. Sermons which occupied two or three hours were customary enough...Nathaniel Ward deplored at that time, "Wee have a strong weakness in New England that when wee are speaking, wee know not how to conclude: wee make many ends before wee make an end." (Alice Morse Earl, *The Sabbath in Puritan England*)

Which led to this sort of thing - Jonathan Edwards:

In a sermon weightily titled "When the Spirit of God Has Been Remarkably Poured out on a People, a Thorough Reformation of Those Things That Were Before Amisss Amongst Them Ought to Be the Effect of It," Edwards speaks against sleeping in church and urges that "persons would avoid laying down their bodies in their seats in the midst of public worship."

(J.I. Packer, "The Glory of God and the Reviving of Religion: A Study in the Mind of Jonathan Edwards," in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*)

I am grateful that those of you who have fallen asleep do not lay your body down.

Our text is more than a remarkable story about the most famous guy to fall asleep during a sermon - window into the life of the church

Three necessary actions for the Christian life derived from observation of the text

I. Commit to Gathering

- A. Almost all of our attention will be devoted to 7-12.
- B. V. 1 - "after the uproar ceased" - disturbance in Ephesus - the gospel expelled idolatry and changed the culture - oh that the gospel would spread disruptively in our day.
- C. V. 1-2 - Paul went about encouraging - a priority for him. AD 56-57 - v. 3 - spends the winter in Greece (Corinth) - likely the place/time he wrote the letter to the Romans
- D. He gathers a diverse group v. 4-6 - Paul lived in community/partnership - Luke is with him v. 5 "us"
- E. Paul comes to City of Troas and on the first day of the week he gathers with the Christians there.
 1. One of the first references in Scripture for the Christian practice of gathering for church on Sunday.

- a) The Sabbath had been Saturday - Christ was raised on Sunday - paradigm shift. Sunday is the Lord's Day and a celebration of his cross.
- F. They gathered in the evening - Sunday was a work day. What we find them doing is very similar to how the church is described in Acts 2:42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

- 1. They gathered on Sunday to worship, break bread (included communion) and hear preaching/teaching.
 - a) These folks were committed - work from sunup to sundown - gather together all evening for church. Gathering as the church is a profound privilege and means of grace. Sadly this sort of attitude appears to be waning.

Illustration: I've heard various church leaders observing that what is considered a regular church goer is 13 times a year - they love the church - they consider themselves faithful. I'm not old but always thought you just go to church on Sunday.

- (1) Travel, sports, affluence - more opportunity

G. Application

- 1. How important is gathering together with the church to you?
 - a) Sunday is important not because it's "Living Hope Day" - it's the Lord's Day!
 - (1) Our soul shrivels when we neglect gathering.
 - (2) If you miss next week it won't kill you - over time as we neglect worshipping, praying, singing, listening to preaching - we will find a perceivable difference in our souls - cynicism, coolness towards God, lack of joy in Christ, diminished zeal in serving the Lord.

Never be absent from God's house on Sundays, without good reason,—never to miss the Lord's Supper when administered in our own congregation,—never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on, this is one way to be a growing and prosperous Christian. The very sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and established, and quickened our hearts. (J.C. Ryle)

- b) Beloved - my desire for you - more importantly God's desire is that you would be a growing and prosperous Christian, cheered and established.
- c) Community Group attendance

[23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

2. I'm concerned that for some of us we have a habit of neglecting to meet together - you are missing out on love, encouragement - we are missing out on experiencing love, encouragement from you.

II. Devour the Word

- A. The church is gathered together to worship Paul begins instructing them. v. 7 "he prolonged his speech until midnight."
 1. We are likely talking about 5 hours or so late into the evening. The people were eager to hear him - willing to stay up late to be instructed from the Word.
 - a) What was he saying? Look at his letters.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

- b) He would have been teaching them the gospel and the way that the good news of Jesus Christ works itself out in the Christian life.
- B. We'll look at the miracle in a minute but notice as well v. 11 - after the shocking incident with Eutychus - he goes back upstairs and continues his teaching/dialogue with them until daybreak.
- C. Past 10 I'm fairly worthless but the appetite these believers have to be instructed from the Bible is admirable and worth our emulating.

I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments. (Psalm 119:13)

1. Proclamation of God's Word - responsive reading, songs, sermon - application of the sermon text in our CGs - we are unabashedly committed to the Word for it is life - Man does not live by bread alone - starvation...
 - D. Application
 1. These early Christians were hungry to hear from God - willing to stay up all night if necessary. How do you respond to preaching? We are wise to cultivate a hungry soul towards the Word.
 - a) Coming in on a Sunday - struggle to get out of the house
 - b) Running around, last minute details - fight in the car
 - c) How wise we are to begin to ready ourselves even Saturday evening so that we are able to come into the meeting with ears open, full of faith to hear God address us through his Word.

[1] My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, [2] making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; [3] yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, [4] if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, [5] then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5)

- d) God calls us to activity

- e) How do approach your CG meeting? With faith that God will meet us as we seek to apply his Word? Posture of one eager to hear and do the will of God?

Third point - the grand aim that God has for us in committing ourselves to gathering and as we cultivate an appetite for his Word:

III. Awaken to Jesus

- A. In this context of worship and instruction we find a young man named Eutychus.
 - 1. V. 9 tired after a long day of work, v. 8 many lamps - the room would have been stuffy - he is overcome by sleep.
 - 2. He falls from a third story window to his death.
 - a) Shocking scene - to see him drop - hear the sickening thud - surely there was panic in the church service!
- B. Paul runs downstairs to this boy who has died - v. 10 - "don't be alarmed" - um, yeah, actually we are pretty stinking alarmed - a boy just fell from a 3rd story window and broke his neck.
- C. "His life is in him" - he wraps his arms around him and raises him from the dead. Reminiscent of the story from 2 Kings 4 where Elisha wraps himself around a dead child and raises him from the dead. We are to understand that Jesus continues to be at work in the world.

[39] And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." [40] And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. [41] Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." [42] And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. (Mark 5:39-42)

- D. Jesus revealed his glory to the church at Troas - surely there was rejoicing in God's grace as they went back upstairs having experienced his mercy and power.
 - 1. Miracles point beyond themselves to the nature of Christ's kingdom - Christ's resurrection points to the one we will enjoy upon his return and he raises our souls out of death and into eternal life as we trust in him.
- E. Application
 - 1. Sleeping in the church
 - 2. CALL TO UNBELIEVERS - awake, live!
 - 3. Even those who are saved can be lulled to sleep - awake to Christ

**[14b]... "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."
 [15] Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. [17] Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. [18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is**

debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [21] submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:14-21)

4. We can become sleepy/Complacent
 - a) Regularly giving yourself over to sin will put you in a spiritual coma
 - (1) Example: porn
 - b) Going through the motions - spiritual practices, church attendance - overly familiar with holy things
 - (1) Continued amazement at the Gospel - I AM RIGHT WITH GOD!
 - (2) There is more in Christ than we have yet apprehended
 - c) So focused inward that we become numb to the lost around us

**The world is sleeping in the dark,
That the church just can't fight,
'cause it's asleep in the light! (Keith Green)**

Close

Commit yourself to gathering
Devour the Word
Awaken to Jesus Christ
This is the will of God for us
Let us not be like those who sleep - Awake, O Sleeper and let Christ shine on you!

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