

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Our reading today comforts me somewhat when people fall asleep during my preaching. I say "somewhat" because it was after midnight when Eutychus fell asleep. I've put them to sleep on Sunday mornings, just a few hours after they awoke from eight hours of sleep! At least none of those sermon sleepers died during my sermons, as Eutychus apparently did, although some might have testified, as they drove home after church, that they were bored to death as I droned on.

It does appear that something supernatural occurred as Paul embraced the fallen boy, and it reminds us of the time when the prophet Elijah similarly embraced a dead boy who subsequently came back to life (2 Kings 4:17-37).

When we read about Paul gathering the elders of the church of Ephesus, do not assume that this somehow proves that the Christians in Ephesus always met as one big group that was overseen by many co-equal elders (a theory sometimes proposed). Luke uses the word "church" to describe the entire body of Christ in Ephesus, which consisted of many small groups, each of which would have been overseen by at least one, and perhaps several, elders.

Paul's words to those Ephesian elders could change the face of Christianity today if they were taken to heart by Christian leaders. Paul reminded them twice of the tears he often shed when he was with them (20:19, 31). How we need more weeping elders today! Where is the passion?

Paul preached "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21). Why has repentance been removed from today's gospel? And why is Jesus so rarely mentioned as being Lord, or treated as Lord, the one whose commandments should be obeyed, the one who gives an inheritance only to "those who are sanctified" (20:32), that is, those who have become holy?

Also take note that Paul did not entertain the idea that preaching repentance and faith was somehow contrary to "the gospel of the grace of God" (20:24). In fact, those two were one and the same to him (compare 20:21 and 24). He knew that God was not offering anyone a license to sin, but was rather offering everyone a temporary opportunity to repent of sin and be forgiven.

Paul was not so big that he couldn't minister to small crowds. He taught "publicly and from house to house" (20:2). Moreover, he never once taught in a building specially built for Christian meetings; nor did he encourage anyone to construct one.

Paul was not afraid to suffer for Christ's sake, and wasn't looking for a more comfortable position as he worked his way up the church career ladder. Rather, he followed the Spirit's leading to Jerusalem, knowing full well that bonds and afflictions awaited him there. His goal was to fulfill the ministry that God had entrusted to him, and he was willing to die for that cause (20:22-24).

Paul did not cater to his crowds, telling them only what they wanted to hear, but rather declared what was truly "profitable," God's "whole purpose," warning people to repent (20:20, 25). He knew that it was the responsibility of the pastors/elders/overseers not just to feed God's flock, but to protect them from wolves that would arise from among them and teach destructive heresies.

Paul was no flashy prosperity preacher and was not motivated by money. Rather, he was willing to work with his hands to provide for his own needs and the needs of others. He practiced what he preached, knowing that greed and covetousness are damning sins. He lived simply, and in doing, set an example for the Ephesian elders. No pastor of a little flock, who earns his living in "secular" work, need be ashamed. He has a biblical precedent.

Finally today, I cannot help but point out that we read words from Jesus' lips that are found nowhere else in Scripture: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (20:35). We should keep that in mind when theologians try to persuade us not to derive any doctrine from the book of Acts because it allegedly was given to us only for historical record. Perish the thought!