



## A Lesson From Eutychus

*TEXT*  
*Jeremiah 31:31–34*  
*Acts 20:7–12*

June 25, 2017 — Sermon by Dr. Rodger Y. Nishioka

**A**s we continue our sermon series, *Living Unafraid in a Frightening World*, the Apostle Paul is on his third and final missionary journey. He is on his way back to Jerusalem and, after a lengthy stay in Greece, he stops in a town in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, named Troas, where he previously visited. He spends a week there, and now it is his last day before he leaves to resume his journey.

Now if Paul follows his usual pattern when he visits, he would likely gather the believers every night to eat together, and then he would preach. It is like an old-fashioned revival series. So the Christians gather for dinner on Paul's last night among them, and Paul starts preaching ... and preaching ... and preaching. He preaches until midnight. There is a young man who is sitting in the window, and he falls into a sleep. It was not just any kind of sleep. The Bible says he fell into a *deep* sleep.

See, you young people who are among us, I want you to know that right now you possess a spiritual gift. It is called "sleep." You have the ability to

sleep. Oh my goodness! I want you to cherish this gift. When you grow older like me, you will lose this gift. Even when I have a morning off, I cannot sleep. You can sleep. We can come into your room and move you, and you still are asleep. It is amazing. You are up at the crack of noon.

So this young man named Eutychus goes into a deep sleep and falls out the window three floors down to the ground, and the Bible says he is dead. Just to be clear, this is not good. It is not good for a young person to die while you are preaching.

So Paul stops and goes down to the street and picks him up and says something rather cryptic. He tells the church not to be alarmed because "his life is still in him." Then Paul apparently drops the boy back on the street and goes upstairs to finally eat. Then he continues preaching until dawn. The story ends with this odd phrase. It says, "Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted."

It is such an odd story. So one wonders why the Holy Spirit would leave this story in the Bible. This is actually a story that I am working on for

a book I am writing about the place of young people in the Bible. Not many Bible scholars even comment on this story.

One German scholar wrote that this story is included in the Bible to prove that the Apostle Paul is able to raise a person from the dead. But as you read his commentary, he does say that it is rather odd that Paul does not include some kind of invocation to God, such as "In the name of Jesus Christ, I bring you to life."

A 20<sup>th</sup> century American scholar wrote that this story clearly is here to tell us that the most important thing that happens when the church gathers is the proclamation of the word of God. That is why Paul had to preach so long. But if that is true, I find it odd that Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, did not record one word of what the Apostle Paul said.

So here is what I think. I think the Holy Spirit kept this story in the Bible to remind us that there really is truth to the aphorism that "actions speak louder than words." I think the Holy Spirit left this story in the Bible to tell us in these days, we are to act more than talk. That is what I think the prophet

Jeremiah meant when he said to the Hebrew people that the days of a new covenant are coming when God will write God's word upon our hearts, and no one will have to say to one another, "Know the Lord" — for all shall know God, from the least to the greatest.

Perhaps one way to live unafraid in this frightening world is to realize that we are being called to act and then to let the words come later.

Before joining you and before teaching at Columbia Seminary, I served for a number of years as a national staff person for the Presbyterian Church USA. I lived in Louisville, Kentucky, and worshipped at the Crescent Hill Presbyterian Church. This was a smaller congregation of about 140 members or so. I was part of a team of volunteers who worked with our youth ministry.

One fall, we gathered to our number a woman and her son, Ann and Scott. They moved to Louisville from Grosse Point, Michigan, after a sudden divorce earlier in the summer. There had been issues of betrayal. Scott was a rising junior in high school. He left behind a church where he was very involved. He was supposed to start that winter on his high school's basketball team. He left behind a girlfriend whom he loved very much.

Ann and Scott found their way to our church, and Ann asked us to do anything we could to get Scott involved — but it was obvious that Scott

was not interested. He was angry and also likely depressed. His routine was that he would sit in their car in the parking lot and wait until the last possible moment to come into the sanctuary, sit in the last pew and then, as soon as the benediction was pronounced, he would head back to their car.

That fall, I was at a session meeting, and we were praying. I asked the elders to pray for Ann — but especially for Scott. I was worried about him. One of our elders was Janet. She was 79 years old and a power bowler and a power knitter. She could usually knit half a sweater during the session meeting. She would hold it up in front of our co-pastors and say, "See, at least something has been done for the kingdom of God during this session meeting."

The next Sunday, Janet was on the lookout for Scott, and she saw him sneak in at the last minute. When he tried to escape the sanctuary at the end of worship, her power bowler moves kicked in, and she caught him and backed him up against the wall and said to him, "Scottie, my name is Janet. I am an elder here, and I sure do love you. I think you are very handsome. I am glad you are here." And she hugged him.

He said, "Thanks, lady," and left.

The next Sunday, he tried a different way out of the sanctuary, and Janet caught him again. She did the same thing. This went on every single Sunday. It was the following spring, and for the first time

since anyone could remember, Janet was not in church. She had developed blood clots in her right leg. It was painful and life-threatening.

Scott was driving home that day, and he asked Ann, "Mom, where was that weird old lady today?"

Ann replied, "Well, honey, which weird old lady? There are several weird old ladies in our congregation."

Scott said, "The one who always hugs me."

Then Ann reminded him that Janet was in the hospital that day. So Scott turned the car around, and Ann told me later that she had to almost run to keep up with her tall, handsome basketball-playing son as he strode through the corridors of Jewish Hospital in downtown Louisville looking for Janet's room.

He barged into her room, and Janet was reading her Bible. She looked up, surprised. She said to him, "Scottie, what are you doing here? Did you come here just to see me?"

Scott said, "Well, we were just driving around."

Then Janet told him to come over and stand by her bed, so she could reach out and hug him. He did, and she hugged him. And then this tall, handsome senior in high school shoved this beautiful lady over, and he sat on her bed with her. He wrapped his basketball wingspan arms around her and rested his chin on her gorgeous gray hair, and he whispered, "How are you doing, Miss Janet?"

Then Janet began to cry. She said, “Oh, Scottie, I am a little afraid. I have not been in a hospital since I birthed my babies years ago. Doctors don’t always know what is happening.”

Then Scott hugged her tight and said, “Oh, ma’am, you are going to be okay. I know it.”

Janet said, “Honey, that’s nice, but I am not sure.”

Scott insisted, “No, ma’am. You are going to be all right. I know it.”

Then Janet said, “How do you know?”

Scott replied, “Because I have been praying for you every day for nearly two years, ever since that first day when you hugged me.”

Janet was surprised. “Honey, you have been praying for me? I have been praying for you. Why have you been praying for me?”

“Don’t you see, ma’am,” Scott replied, “I have been saying to God, ‘Okay, God, the rest of my life is in ruins, but all you have to do is take care of this one weird old lady, and I know I am going to be okay.’”

Janet asked again, “Scottie, why have you been praying for me?”

Scott said, “Because, ma’am, by the grace of God, you are helping to save my life.”

Words are important, of course. But I am convinced in these days that we are being called to act more than talk. We are being called to put our faith into action, so people will see that we are followers of Jesus

by what we do — and then to let the words come later — a lesson thanks to a kid named Eutychus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.