

Exposition of Acts 20:1–12 at Wheelersburg Baptist Church on November 7, 2021

Opening Story:

Race car driver Dale Earnhardt was known for being so calm before races that occasionally he would take a catnap just before the start. While other drivers would have a pulse rate of 100 to 120 before a race, his would be less than 60.

But on August 31, 1997, at the Southern 500 race...Earnhardt unintentionally took catnapping to a dangerous new level. At the start of the race, Earnhardt fell asleep at the wheel—he went into a semiconscious state but kept on driving. When he reached the first turn, he hit the wall but kept on going. At the second turn he again hit the wall, harder this time. He continued slowly around the track for two laps, looking for his pit but unable to find it. Finally he pulled off the track. Later he would say he remembered nothing of this.

Sixteen doctors examined Earnhardt to find out what had happened. They found nothing definite...The doctors didn't think the problem would recur, and they cleared Earnhardt to continue racing.

Frightening but true, it is possible, for a while, to drive over one hundred miles an hour and yet be asleep. In the same way, we can be busily racing through life—our eyes seemingly open, our hands on the wheel, our foot to the floor—yet spiritually asleep. Sooner or later, though, the trouble begins.

EXEGETICAL WORK:

Need: Intensified discipleship

Subject: The tireless apostle meets a tired servant.

Purpose: To anticipate mission transitions

Biblical Idea: The tireless apostle intensified his discipleship efforts in anticipation of a mission transition revealing the danger of sleepy servanthood.

Outline:

- Paul departed company with the Ephesian disciples after the uproar ceased for Macedonia (20:1; cf. chapter 16).
 - Paul's total travel time in the region, according to Bock, looks to have been 1 1/2 - 2 years.
 - The uproar - 19:23-41
- Paul spent three months passing through the Macedonian and Grecian regions encouraging disciples with lengthy sermons & dialogues (20:2; cf. 15:32).
- Paul decided to return through Macedonia because of the Jewish opposition while waiting to sail from Corinth for Syria (20:3; cf. 19:21; 20:22-24).
 - It is likely that Paul wrote Romans during his time in Corinth.
 - It is also likely that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians during his travels through Macedonia.
 - After his discovery of a secret plot (9:24; 20:19; 23:30), Paul decided to change his travel plans while he lingered to set sail.
- Sopater (and Luke) began to accompany Paul, but an international small group of Macedonian and Asian disciples had gone ahead and waited for them at Troas (20:4).
 - The Team
 - Bock shares the team reveals "success of a wide-ranging ministry."
 - Berea is Berea.
 - God is at work in the people and decisions he has provided in the mission work.
 - True displays of diversity in unity are found in the collective call to Christ in his mission. If the world could humble itself before Christ, it would find that the church has been practicing diversity in mission for centuries, since its inception. It's not some fake or forced thing. It's a grace community figuring out God's will in Christ together.
 - Luke joins the team.
 - Athenagoras in his work *Plea for Christians* describes the idolatrous scene in Troas:

- Bock comments that the wind likely played a role in turning a 2-day trip coming to a 5-day trip departing.
- Paul, having gathered the whole group together to break bread (fellowship, covenant) on the first day of the week, began dialoguing and stretched out the discussion until midnight (20:7).
 - Acts 16:26; Luke 2:8, 37
- Luke explained that the upper room had sufficient lighting for such a meeting (20:8).
 - "There are many lights, probably torches, in the upper chamber so that Paul can continue to speak. They may well have helped to contribute to what is about to happen, by affecting the air quality and/or creating a [drowsy] atmosphere, but the text says nothing about this" (620).
- The young man (son or slave?) Eutychus (meaning fortune) experienced a deadly fall after sinking into a deep sleep during Paul's lengthy dialogue (20:9).
 - The verbs in the verse give us a break from the aorist aspect, first zooming into Eutychus and the slowly panning out to watch the scene unfold.
 - Bock and others seem to emphasize the youth of Eutychus, but Neanias seems to require him to be between 24–40 years old, leading me to believe that pais should be translated as son or servant.
 - Acts 7:58; 23:17-18, 22
 - Calvin cautions thinking too poorly of the young man because he succumbed to natural weariness. That's well taken. He is in a crowded room at midnight listening to preaching. I think our thought should match precisely what we think of the disciples when Jesus wants them to stay awake.
- Paul rushed to embrace Eutychus and explained that alarm was unnecessary for Eutychus lived (20:10).
 - To fall upon - epipipto - crowd pressing in (Mk 3:10). seized with fear (Lk 1:12; Acts 19:17; Rev. 11:11); prodigal son's father's embrace (Lk 15:20); Spirit falling upon believers (Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15); insults and persecutions (Rom. 15:3)
 - The idea is forceful pressing in, presence physically expressed as a tow armed embrace or a crowd's pressing in, abstractly as fear, persecution, or positively as the Spirit's indwelling.

- Luke could have employed healing language here, but he doesn't. Some see an allusion to Elijah (1 Kings 17:21) or Elisha (2 Kings 4:34). However, there are no verbal connections there either.
- What we do have is an allusion to Jesus tirelessly ready to be arrested and go to the cross and Paul ready in a similar way. Where Jesus had sleepy disciples, so does Paul now imitate the experience of Jesus with Eutychus.
- Luke summarized Paul's long last night in Troas (20:11).
- Luke resolved the situation regarding Eutychus, who remained at the meeting and was alive (20:12).

THEOLOGICAL WORK:

Timeless Tension: Tireless saints and tired servants

Timeless Purpose: For the tireless to embrace and encourage the tired.

Timeless Truth: God's mission calls for the longevity of the church through the tireless discipleship of the tired.

HOMILETICAL WORK:

Need: Mission readiness in the next generation

Subject: Anticipating mission transitions

Purpose: To embrace the inevitable handoff

Today's Message: Participate in prolonging the mission.

Applications: 5 Ways to Participate in Prolonging the Mission

1. Plan for the church's perseverance in the mission through persecution (20:1, 3).
2. Intensify training at clear transition points (20:2–3, 7–11).
 - Remember, at a certain point, Jesus began sharing about his death with the disciples.
3. Build and serve on a diverse team (20:4).
4. Contextualize the mission through biblical faithfulness and ministry competence (20:1–12).
5. Graciously encourage members with downfalls (20:9–12).

Closing Story: Return to Opening Story.