

Part 36: A Gospel Worth Wearying For

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As we continue our series this morning in the book of Acts Luke is going to show us, “a gospel worth wearying for.”

Like most kids, mine do not enjoy waking up early. But last Monday, our friends Ed and Anna Moore had an early morning flight out of Missoula. And despite our protestations—the majority of my kids were up without assistance by 4:50 in the morning. Why? Because it was worth it. They grew to love Ed and Anna—and despite how tired they were or would be, it was worth it.

At face value we generally don’t like exerting ourselves. When given the opportunity we choose that of least resistance. But my guess is that even the laziest or most efficient person among us are willing to weary themselves when they see the value in it.

I know one dad who has started following Formula One racing. I asked him why and he said, “I don’t really get it, but my son loves it and I want to love what my son loves.” Maybe you’re not by nature an outdoorsy person, but because your roommate is you’ll find yourself lost in the woods with her because it’s worth it.

When you think about your own life right now—where are you willing to be wearied? I don’t mean this in a dull and unfortunate way—but where are you eager to spend and be spent even though it is at times exhausting?

As we’ve been in Acts—it’s easy to see what Paul is content to weary himself with isn’t it? Over the next three weeks Paul is going to finish his third and final ministry campaign. Writing from a Roman prison Paul says to Timothy that he has been poured out like a drink offering in ministry. Take away the persecutions he encountered and just consider the time spent on the road for Paul. By the end of his journeys he will have traveled nearly 3,000 miles without modern transportation. That means he would have spent over a year doing nothing but waking up and walking, and by boat he spent anywhere between three to seven weeks on the Mediterranean sea.

It was apparent that Paul was willing to be wearied for the sake of the church—and today we are going to see how the church itself was willing to be wearied in her pursuit of fellowship, teaching and growth in their walk with Jesus.

That’s because the **gospel [is] worth wearying for**. We weary ourselves for what seems worthy--and what we see today is a gospel worth all of it.

We will see this in three ways. First we will see, **Frequent Assembly**, then **Fervent Attention**, and lastly **Faithful Affirmation**.

The next three weeks record Paul's journey back to Jerusalem, and back by popular demand--is a **map**. It's helpful to know where Paul is going to give us a little bit of context for our passages today.

Our passage today opens for us describing Paul's travels from Ephesus, up through Macedonia and down to Corinth in Greece. That's the orange line you all see. He spent three months sharing the gospel in Corinth, but then verse 3 tells us that when he was about to board a boat to head back to his home church in Syria it was discovered that the Jews were plotting to kill him. So, Paul took the long way home--that's the green line--that went back through the inland parts of Greece and Macedonia.

But as Paul is being bounced around, with plans thwarted and opposition looming--Luke introduces us to a growing team of men who accompany Paul: **Acts 20:4**. From Greece we have Sopater of Berea, from Thessalonica we have Aristarchus and Secundus. From Asia we have Gaius and Timothy from Derbe, as well as Tychicus and Trophimus. These are men who are from the churches that Paul planted in his journeys. And what we see throughout Paul's letters is that he would take men from their local churches, train them for ministry, and then send them to plant and encourage other local churches.

As Paul plants churches, he takes with him men who he's training from those churches, and he hauls those men across the Mediterranean to place them in other churches. Paul was not only willing to weary himself for the establishment of churches—but he has this gravitas, this pull, which draws others into it as well. But a relentless commitment to the church was not restricted to Paul and his students—Christians, ordinary believers understood the unique relationship between their new life in Christ and their ongoing life in the church.

This leads us to our first point this morning: **Faithful Assembly**.

In verse 6, Paul crosses over from Europe and lands at a town called Troas in Asia. Paul has been in Troas before. But he didn't do any preaching there that we know of. It was in Troas that they spent one night and then were convinced by Paul's nighttime vision that God was calling them to cross into Europe and preach Christ in Macedonia.

But, while Paul was off gallivanting in Europe the church in Asia did what the church has always done. Ordinary Christians from other area churches evangelized ordinary Christians in Troas, and without any apostolic handling or specific teaching, Christians put two and two together. A belief in Christ produces the body of Christ. Confession produces a congregation.

If you go to a new town and want to find basketball players, you go to the YMCA. If you want to find other mom's with young kids, you go to the park. If you want to meet other college students, you go to campus. And if you want to find Christians--you go to church.

We learn a little about this church service in **verse 7**: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them."

This is our first glimpse into a Sunday church service in the book of Acts. Persecution from the Jews had finally forced Christians out of the old pattern of Saturday Sabbath worship in the Synagogues. Now, on the first day of the week the Christians gathered as their own fellowship. They did so because it was on Sunday that Jesus was raised from the dead, and it seemed fitting for their weekly gathering to be a direct reminder of this. By the end of the New Testament, Sunday had grown to be called, "The Lord's Day."

I once hear a man describe his growth as a Christian in three key stages. First, he described his conversion to Jesus by grace through faith. That is the key, crowning and exclusive conversion which one

needs to be saved by God. But he went on to describe two smaller conversions that gave life to his faith in Jesus. One was a conversion to sound theology--realizing that a big God and his plan for the world is the very heart of the Bible and our reality. The second was, what he called, a conversion to the church. For years he had believed in Jesus and loved theology, but never realized the importance of a local church.

But to see the importance of the church we don't just look to Christian practice, but to the passion of Christ. Jesus wearied himself for the church. Ephesians 5 says that Christ died for the church. In Matthew 18 Jesus gives the keys to the kingdom, the keys that loose and the keys that bind to the church. While Jesus died to save the whole church (that is all Christians everywhere), Jesus assumes that invisible church will gather as visible local bodies. That's what the word church means. It is an *ekklesia*, "an assembly."

Jesus gave his life to create the church so that Christians would live their lives in the church. That's why the author of Hebrews says this: **Hebrews 10:23-25**, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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."

Just as Jesus is the sweet and eternal refuge of the soul for all eternity—the church is the refuge for the Christian in a world that is not heaven. It is where we work by gathering to consider how to stir up one another in holiness and encourage one another to hold fast to the confession.

If we want to be a Christian that makes it, we must busy ourselves in the membership of the church. The world will try and throw so many new metrics of Christian growth and community at you—but the simplicity of the church is the bread and butter of Christian living.

But in this seemingly ordinary assembly in Troas, something extraordinary happened.

And here we see our second point: **Fervent Attention**. It's often said that the marks of a true gospel church are two things: the faithful preaching of the word and the right practice of the sacraments. And we see both of these in Troas as Paul taught and they waited to take the Lord's Supper together. But notice how attentive the church was to Paul's teaching.

Acts 20:7-9, "There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead."

I'm not going to bury the lede here, Paul preached for hours and while he preached longer still, a young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window, and he grew sleepy, and he fell asleep, and falling asleep he fell three stories out of the window to his death.

From our perspective today--the humor abounds in this circumstance. There is a book on preaching playfully titled, "Saving Eutychus: How to preach God's word and keep people awake." I've heard message addressed to pastors encouraging them to keep their preaching engaging and hopefully, Lord willing, short. I saw a video of Pope Francis urging Catholic priests to keep their messages under eight minutes.

I've also heard this passage preached against lazy listeners. Fall asleep while hearing God's word and you'll die.

It may be that pastors need to get better at preaching. It may be that members need to get better at listening. Those might both be true. But I don't think either of those are the point that Luke is making in here. He doesn't seem to be faulting anyone for their failings--but instead he's drawing us to the unfortunate limits of humanity in the face of a congregation who otherwise wished to pay fervent attention to Paul's preaching.

Let's notice some of these clues in the text. First, Paul prolonged his speech until midnight--but it was still a full house. We know that because Eutychus was sitting in a window. This wasn't because he was a brooding teenager. It was because the house was full! Have you seen clips of train cars in India, or trolley cars in San Francisco where people are hanging out of the windows? That's what's going on here. People are cramped but too captivated to leave church.

Paul went late into the night. So late that moms and dads kept kids up past bedtime. So late that it grew dark. So dark that they had to light lamps. Those lamps made the room dimly light but delightfully warm. I remember a microbiology class I had at 8am in college. I would do the work to get there in time, but the lecture hall had no windows, the lights were dim, the room was so warm--and try as I might--I couldn't for the life of me stay away.

And here, Paul preached till midnight--Eutychus became sleepy, and as Paul talked longer still--he was entirely overcome and where you might jolt yourself awake from your chair--he jolted himself straight out of a window.

Are you starting to see the picture that Luke is painting? This is not a humorous story of a boring church service and a dull preacher--this is a story of the captivating power of God's word, the unceasing appetite of the Christian and the stark reality of the limits of humanity.

One of my favorite songs is "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing." There are times where I wish I had more than one tongue to praise God because my one tongue cannot speak as many, as much or as magnified praise as I believe God to be worth. But what we see in Troas might as well be named, "O for a Thousand Ears to Hear."

Their ears were not wearied, their hearts were not wearied. It was not death by boredom--it was death by limitation. Have you ever been at a meal and you wish you had seven stomachs to keep eating that delicious food? Have you ever been on a date and wished there to be hours left in the movie or the concert so that you might continue to spend time with your date?

What we see here is not primarily bored Christians and boring pastors but the blazing beauty of hearing, learning and loving Jesus through the preaching and teaching of his word in the context of the fellowship of the local church.

I wonder how many of us read this story and laugh thinking Eutychus escaped! But remember—he died! Many of us see are quick to find objects worthy of our attention and energy everywhere except God's word. We are often willing to watch countless videos, read countless books, and spend countless hours to perfect our jump shot, our gardening, or our road trip agenda while at the same time being entirely unwilling to weary ourselves in the pursuit of Jesus.

Dear Christian, what are you willing to be wearied for? If we are honest does spending more than 45 minutes listening to a sermon sound like a punishment? Does 20 minutes of Bible reading in the still of the morning sound more like boot camp than the blessed life? Does striving to grow in your pursuit of the knowledge of God seem just as interesting as watching paint dry?

What would change for you if your financial future was dependent upon your growth in holiness? If you were paid time and half for every minute spent studying God's word or gathering with God's people—how many of you would rise up early and stay up late and happily weary ourselves for that prize. But do you not realize that holiness, fellowship with the saints, and the worship of God is of eternal value and immediate benefit?

One Puritan pastor, reflected in this way: "If I delighted simply in a garden, I would often walk in it. If I love my books, I often and almost unweariedly read them. The food that I love I often feed on; the clothes that I love often wear; the sports that I love I often play; the business I love I am much employed in. Can I love God above all these and yet have no desires to be with him? Is it not more likely a sign of hatred than of love when the thoughts of our appearing before God are our most grievous thoughts and when we take ourselves as burdened when we must [come to him]? I would hardly take him for a true friend who was as content to be absent from me as much as we are absent from God."

I find in my own heart that I often curb my pursuit of God because it sounds tiring—but the best things in life are tiring. Loving my wife is tiring. Working out is tiring. Climbing a mountain is tiring. Parenting is tiring. Cheering at a Griz game is tiring. Hosting friends late into the night is tiring. But anything that is worthwhile is worth wearying for. And what joy might we find when we weary ourselves for that which promises eternal life!

A scary question I asked myself while writing this sermon is one I will pose to you: What do those closest to you see you invest the most energy into—even unto exhaustion? Do my kids see in me great fortitude and sacrifice when it comes to home projects—but at the first slow blink of an eye—I put my Bible away? Do your roommates see in you someone who will schedule study group after study group but you're unwilling to consistently plan to be at church on Sundays? Do your friends see your schedule filled with play date after play date with other families with kids—but there's never enough time to go to a Bible Study or class at church?

And I hear this, and I feel this in my own heart! We might say: "Yes, but I've got to live right! Hobbies aren't bad! Schedules aren't bad! Isn't there life to be lived!" Yes! Yes! I would even say eternal life!

And where do we find life? You might find life in hunting—but one day you will die and hunting will do nothing for you. You might find life in vacations—but one day you will die and your time-share gives nothing to you. But here, for the man who dies while submitting himself to godly zeal what does he find?

Acts 20:10-12, "But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted."

What did Eutychus find though it seemed he lost it all? Life! Here is our final point this morning: **Faithful Affirmation**.

Eutychus was reminded that he gave up nothing. That all which he lost was nothing compared to what he would gain.

But I want to speak to others in here as well. My guess is there are people in here who think me to be the worst snake oil salesman they've met. Certainly, this is a joke right? Or maybe you look around and you've seen others who live life like this: they prioritize their time, their finances, their family life around these biblical principles. And while you might not every say it out loud you think in your heart, "What a waste. I can't imagine how joyless that would be. What a boring friend, what a lame childhood."

But notice the effect Eutychus' life had on those who may have thought the same thing about Eutychus. By the end they were not "a little comforted." Which is to say, they were all very encouraged.

I think we need to spend less time trying to save the Eutychus' among us. We need them to remind us of what we miss. When Paul brought Eutychus back to life notice what didn't happen. They didn't say, "Whoa, that was a close call. But look at the time, you're right. We should all be going."

Instead, reminded of the Jesus who gives life to those who follow him, they said, "Wait a minute, we can't leave yet. We haven't taken the Lord's Supper! Paul--you said you had an eighty point sermon and we were just on point 63! Let's finish this up and then we can head home."

There are so many things in this life that call for you frequent assembly and your fervent attention--but none of those things can finally affirm what they promise. But Jesus and his church can. For Jesus can remove your sins by grace through faith. He can give us life, and life abundantly, he gives us peace with God and with one another. And then in the church we weekly remind one another that this life--this is the life.

We do not need what the world needs, and are therefore free to use what the world uses without worshipping what the world worships. As Paul says to the church in **Colossians 3:1-4**, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

When we seek Christ zealously in our hearts and publically with the church--we miss out on nothing. For our life is hidden with him. This scene in Troas affirms it for us--but the scene in Jerusalem affirms in more.

For as Paul says, "If Christ has not be raised from the dead we are of all people most to be pitied." But, Christ has risen, and because he has risen we know where to find life and where to spend our life.

I want my kids to see that every day I work hard to love them, to provide for them, and to serve them--and I sleep hard so that in the morning I might get up and do it again. I want my wife to see that I love her, that I will work for her, care for her, and die for her--and that I might fall asleep with her on the couch before she's ready for bed because I am spent--but in the morning, I'm going to get back up and to it again.

As good parents, and good spouses do so for the joyful life in the home--how much more ought we Christians to spend and be spent for the kingdom of God joyfully knowing that what awaits us is the faithful affirmation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Richard Baxter, who we mentioned earlier captured this well when he said this: **"I will no longer live a dying life for fear of dying, nor will my life be made uncomfortable with the fear of losing it."**

Dear church, let us give ourselves to the Jesus who saves us--and lived life to the hilt for his glory, waling with his church, dwelling in his word, and laboring not for the temporary rest of this life--but for the eternal rest of the next.