

**June 20, 2021**  
**And Now for Something Completely Different**  
**Acts 20:7-12**

Some stories in the Bible are just odd. Balaam's donkey speaks (Numbers 22), people survive a fiery furnace (Daniel 3), Jonah is swallowed by a fish (Jonah 1-3). The Book of Acts has more than its fair share of completely different things, too. Peter and Paul miraculously escape prison (Acts 12, 16). People are healed by Peter's shadow passing over them (5:15) and by handkerchiefs Paul touched (19:11-12). And a young man falls three stories to his death and is miraculously brought back to life. What's going on here?

***First, in all these stories (and so many more), God is God.*** If God wants to bring fire from heaven and burn water-soaked offerings (1 Kings 18), make axe heads float (2 Kings 6), raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11), or bring Eutychus back to life, He is free to do that. After all, if we believe God really is God, that He created the universe and all that is in it (or the multiverse, depending on your physics) and designed all the natural laws that govern it, then He is more than capable of doing whatever He chooses to do. If He chooses to "step outside the rules" on occasion, as Creator, He can do that. Can God still do miracles? Absolutely. In 2021, God can still do whatever He wants to do ...

***Second, God is a God of surprises.*** Sometimes God does things we'd never expect. Who would imagine He would give Moses a staff that turned into a snake (as an ophidiophobe, that would have been my worst nightmare)? Who would imagine Peter would find a coin in a fish's mouth to pay his taxes (Matthew 17:27)? Who would think God would care about a slave boy who fell asleep during a church service?

Can God still surprise us? Absolutely. I have been phenomenally surprised by how God has helped us through the past 16+ months. People have adapted to new technology and learned new skills. We have seen musicians blossom, families make videos together, and so much more. We have seen vaccines developed and rolled out in answer to prayer. Just when we think we have God figured out, He surprises us.

***Third, God is a God of mystery.*** Sometimes, we don't understand God. When Jesus is arrested, endures unfair trials, is brutally beaten, and crucified, why doesn't God intervene? When Stephen is dragged before the Sanhedrin; when liars falsely accuse him; when religious leaders stone him, why doesn't God intervene? James, in prison, is executed (Acts 12:1-3). Immediately after, Peter is in prison and God miraculously rescues (12:4-19); why? Many faithful people die over the 30+ years covered by the Book of Acts; only Tabitha (9:36-41) and Eutychus are miraculously brought back to life? Why them? What about the others?

Some of the most godly people I know, who deserve to be blessed by God, have some of the most difficult lives. They wrestle with chronic illnesses. They deal with lots of misfortunes. Some have died far too young. Meanwhile, some despicable wretches seem to live charmed lives. They live long, successful, healthy lives. Why is that?

If I were God, whenever anyone is unjustly imprisoned and people prayed for them (like both

James and Peter), I would release them (not just one). Whenever anyone is seriously ill and people prayed for them, I would heal them all (not just two). But God doesn't do that. Why does God miraculously deliver Peter and not James, raise Eutychus and not others? We have NO idea. God is God. There is a LOT of mystery we just have to live with.

We have to accept that God is all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present – we are NOT all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present. At a trivial level, to print all the articles on Wikipedia, would generate 1000 volumes, 1,200 pages each, and take about 80 meters of shelf space — more than one million pages in all. I know only a tiny amount of that. God knows it all and much, much more. The fact that I can't comprehend what God is doing is hardly surprising. I can trust Him to know what He is doing and why, better than I do ...

### ***A Bit More About Eutychus***

Paul is in the midst of a marathon journey from Corinth (southern Greece) to Jerusalem, a distance of 3500 kms. His final trip. Along the way, he stops off in Troas (western Turkey).

Paul is speaking at a crowded meeting. It's evening. Since it's a normal working day, the church would meet either very early in the morning or very late at night (or both). Paul goes on and on, late into the night. From what we know of Paul, that's hardly surprising. At this point, he has just written his letter to the Romans. If you have read Romans lately, you'll know it's a difficult letter. Paul's mind is churning with debates about justification by works or faith, old Adams and new Adams, the relationship between Israel and Jesus, and much more – ideas that still make theologians' heads spin.

In the learning style of the day, there would be interruptions, discussion, and debate. Questions would fly to and fro. Paul's answers would range across Scripture from Adam, to Moses, to David, from the Exodus to the exile. There might be a pause to pray. To sing a hymn. For the Lord's Supper. To read a Psalm or from one of the Prophets. And then the dialogue, discussion, and debate would begin again.

A young man named Eutychus is sitting by an upstairs window in a warm room. He is a slave: "Eutychus" is a common Greek slave name. He has likely worked all day – probably a 16-hour day. He is tired. As a **slave**, he has no formal education. As a **Greek** slave, he has none of the Old Testament background Jewish people would have. All this talk of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah would be all Greek – well, all Hebrew – to him.

Maybe he has already come to know Jesus. Maybe he is just curious about Jesus. The meeting is going on and on. It's late. It's hot. All this heady talk about theology would be like me sitting in on a lecture in theoretical physics. It's not surprising that he nods off to sleep. The discussion/worship service/prayer meeting is then tragically interrupted as Eutychus falls from the window and crashes to the courtyard three floors below.

Paul, like Elijah in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17), rushes to him, throws his arms around him, and declares him alive. Some scholars suggest Eutychus was only stunned. Luke, the author of Acts, is a medical doctor. Luke definitively pronounces him dead (20:10). Eutychus

**IS** dead, but God performs an amazing miracle: God raises a genuinely dead person back to life. The name "Eutychus" literally means "Lucky." On this occasion, he certainly was.

*"Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together"* (20:11). They had shared the Lord's Supper earlier that evening (20:7). Why again? Think about it for a moment. What does the Lord's Supper represent? When we gather for the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that Jesus died AND that He rose again, overcoming death itself. These people just witnessed a person die AND rise again, overcoming death itself. Imagine how profound it would be, if you just witnessed a real, "live" resurrection to reflect on Jesus' death and resurrection? Your own death and resurrection? It's the ultimate object lesson.

*"Paul continued talking to them until dawn, then he left"* (20:11). There is no stopping Paul now. He is so excited about who Jesus is, what Jesus is doing (He is literally raising people from the dead), that sleep doesn't matter anymore. Clearly people stick around to listen. If I had just seen someone who I know is dead resuscitated back to life, I would find it hard to sleep – and want to learn a LOT more about Jesus – too.

What happens to Eutychus next? We don't know. He's never mentioned again. He's still a slave. That has not changed. But he has experienced the power of the presence of Jesus. His life has been saved by Jesus, literally and figuratively. Even though he may not be "free" from slavery, he is free in Jesus. In Jesus, we are all equally loved and equally blessed with Jesus' Spirit. We find identity. We find dignity. We find purpose. We find hope. Christianity is about Jesus compellingly calling to the lost, the weak, the suffering, and the poor – literally and figuratively - and giving us dignity, purpose, hope, and freedom. And, Christianity challenges those social inequalities and creates a whole new counterculture of love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, compassion, and reconciliation.

Eutychus, this Greek slave, is now part of an amazing community. Churches in Paul's day were communities of followers of Jesus who met in homes. A few believers were wealthy landowners. A few were tradespeople. The vast majority were slaves. Eutychus, as part of the church in Troas, would be part of a community of people who love one another, serve one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, honour one another, live in harmony with one another, build each other up, teach each other, care for each other, share each other's burdens, do good to each other, and pray for each other. That's a precious gift.

What about us? We live in a culture where love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, compassion, and reconciliation are in short supply. Some churches these days, for instance, choose judgment over grace, outrage over compassion, lawsuits over forgiveness, and anger over love.

*We can have new life in Jesus.* When I came to faith in Jesus, I longed for hope and a worldview that gave shape to my life. I found that in Jesus. Christianity provided a compelling framework that made sense of everything. Like Eutychus, my basic circumstances didn't change. I still struggled to find my way in the world. I still needed a job. I still needed to pay my bills. But at church, I experienced God. I found life, purpose, meaning, and identity in **Jesus**.

All of us have had a very TOUGH 16 months. For some, this has been the hardest year we've ever experienced. For those of us who struggle with mental health and depression, this has been awful. What we really need is to experience God. We need to experience the Holy Spirit. We need to meet with **Jesus**. When we have cried out to **Jesus**, we have been comforted, encouraged, and strengthened by His Spirit (I hope). When you feel at your wits end, when you turn to **Jesus**, you find comfort, hope, strength, and healing in **Jesus**. As a church, the distinctive gift we have to offer out world is **Jesus**. Simply **Jesus**. Not anger. Not judgment. Not politics. Other places can provide that in spades. We offer **Jesus**.

Our culture needs an alternative to itself, not an echo of itself. In a divided world, Christians should be the help and the hope, not the hate. People need the love, comfort, hope, and healing that comes – that only comes – through **Jesus**. Forget the politics, outrage, and anger. Our friends and neighbors need authentic, grace-filled, hope-bearing, truthful people.

*We can be part of an amazing community.* When I came to faith, my church helped me genuinely encounter God, AND they embraced me, encouraged me, nurtured me, and inspired me. They became my second family, my church family. People at church had all sorts of political, ideological and personal differences but were united by their love for **Jesus**.

A lot of us are finding ourselves less gracious than we were. Judged anyone lately? The answer for many of us (including me) is ... yes. From the guy who cut me off in traffic, to the person who differs on vaccines, to my marijuana-smoking neighbor ... it's so easy to judge.

Judgment gets worse from there. It's the basis of racism, sexism, almost every other 'ism' you can think of – and divisions in the church. But judgment is fundamentally incompatible with authentic Christian faith. Jesus said Christians should be known for how deeply we love. But studies show that, in the eyes of many non-Christians, we're known for how deeply we judge, not for how deeply we love. As one pundit says, *"The problem in many cases is not that unchurched people don't know any Christians. The problem is that they do. And they don't like us – for good reason."* He goes on, *"I try to remember this rule: If I'm judging someone, I'm not loving them. You can't judge someone and love them at the same time."*

Despite the isolation of Covid, we have (I hope) been blessed by being part of this family of people who love one another, serve one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, honour one another, live in harmony with one another, build each other up, teach each other, care for each other, share each other's burdens, do good to each other, and pray for each other. That's a precious gift. It's a rare treasure in an angry, bitter, divided world.

As we all begin to regather and re-engage, our community needs Jesus, more than ever, and the church, more than ever. As people of **Jesus**, we can be the people of **Jesus**. When we do that, we are something completely different from anything else in our world. When we live like that, God can do miracles – and bring healing and hope to a hurting world.

©2021 by Bruce Martin  
First Baptist Church  
1614 – 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3  
(403) 327-2082  
[bruce@firstb.net](mailto:bruce@firstb.net)