

The emphasis of Paul's encouragement in Troas is two-fold: The Word of Life Taught and Demonstrated

It is easy to read this story and assume that the point of this brief story is Eutychus. However, he is not the point. The point, and the emphasis of the apostle is the Word of the gospel.

The ministry which seemed to be the most important to the apostle was the ministry of God's Word, the explication and explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ – the promise and fulfillment of God's story centered upon its hero, Jesus, who died for our sins and was raised up to make us acceptable to God.

Thus, the "reasoning" which the apostle did in Troas, we can also see in the letters which wrote during this time and immediately afterwards (2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossian, Philippians, and Philemon). In them he is constantly expressing the significance of God's work in sending Jesus, the centrality and sufficiency of God's work through Jesus' death and resurrection, and the supremacy and the superiority of Jesus as the ruling authority over all things, having triumphed over sin and death. The implications of God's work in Jesus should lead His people to live life differently, to live ALL of life differently. Therefore, he usually writes to clarify the gospel, explain its significance and exalt the God who works it, then he proceeds to demonstrate how Christians should live in the light of this. Eutychus' death and life are visible object lessons of these implications of the person and work of Jesus.

Eutychus, whose name means "good fortune", fell into a "deep" sleep during Paul's class. This probably meant that he didn't simply doze off, but that he was sleeping in the window, having leaned upon its post in the fresh night air. Luke is very clear, using a participle to describe the manner by which he fell into a

deep sleep, and he states it simply as “while Paul was reasoning *considerably*.” This means that Paul was talking for a “considerable amount of time.” Past midnight, Luke says, and the large number of lamps to light the darkened room, the flickering and warmth, induce an exhausted Eutychus into slumber.

Luke tells us that Paul spoke so long “because he intended to leave the next day.” He was trying to get in all that he wanted to say to them because he was intending to leave the following morning. Therefore, Eutychus simply fell asleep during a long Bible study, so to speak. Or, you could call him the first one to drop out of one of Paul’s classes.

Many pastors have used this as a warning to those who fall asleep during sermons, and as a justification for preaching sermons that are so long. Luke does not do this at all. In fact, he goes to length to justify Eutychus’ sleep by mentioning over and over again how long Paul spoke and the number of lamps, etc. I will not do this, either, because one could also imply that to preach such a long sermon one must also be expected to leave town the next day, which, I assume, would also be welcomed by you if I did preach until midnight.

So, Eutychus falls from the third story. Now, in the homes of the time, that would be a fall of about 25-30 feet. If he was sitting in the window, with his feet either on the sill or inside the window, that means that he fell 25 feet headfirst to the stone below. Eutychus, the son of “good fortune”, had plummeted to his death during Bible class.

Now, before we go any further, imagine yourself in that room for a moment. Let the reality sink in. A young man falls out the window during Bible study, and dies? What goes through your mind? Can you hear the gasp of the closest group of people. The wail of a sister? A scream from the closest friend who tried

to grab his feet as they slipped over the sill? You see, as we read this, that upper room is silent, without the reality of the sounds of such a scene, and without that visceral punch to your chest as your adrenals kick. We usually only dream in one sense at a time. Usually sight. This is what makes cinema so powerful. It can combine multiple senses. So, imagine this story purposefully. A young man just fell out of a window and died during Sunday school.

This experience is what makes what follows even more surreal. A rush of people downstairs, all trying to funnel through a stairway barely larger than my shoulders. Surrounding him, they “pick him up”. They grab onto him and take him into their arms to comfort him. But, alas, he has no life in him.

Then, Paul pushes through the onlookers as they cover their mouths and bury their heads into each other’s shoulders. And what does he do? He “falls upon him”, Luke says, like a grieving father falls upon a son who has died. He takes him from the men who have picked him up, and he folds his arms around him, drawing him in close to himself.

Can you see this now? The revered teacher embracing the young man’s limp body, with a grip that seems stronger than a mere stranger’s concern? My sorrow would be amplified in this moment. It is too much to bear...then the teacher speaks.

“Don’t be upset.” WHAT?! Eutychus is my friend, Paul! He was a kind young man, a servant. He took the back row when you came to teach, Paul, when everyone else crammed up to be close to hear you. He just fell out of the window! Don’t be upset?! My turmoil is boiling up through my eyes! Why shouldn’t my hands shake and breath catch in my throat? He is DEAD, Paul! DEAD!

“His soul is in him.” And with those words, the sadness became untrue. The whole event became like a bad dream, a nightmare which terrified my soul in one moment and in the next dissolved into the clear wakeful reality that Eutychus was now alive.

Such a moment must have brought back the story of Peter who prayed and Tabitha was raised from the dead and restored to her little community of Lydda. It is God who grants life, and he did so through Peter, and now through Paul, to show that this gospel of resurrection is for Jews and Gentiles the same – the same gospel creates the same life to form the same kingdom – one restoration as one people of God. And this wasn’t the first time that God had done so. He used both Elijah and Elisha in similar manners and for the same reason. As the widow whose son was revived through Elijah proclaimed as her son was returned to her, “Now I know that you are a prophet and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.” In the same way, the church had the gospel encouragement confirmed in the land of the Troas.

Then, the apostle hands him to the others, turns around and goes back inside and up the stairs.

You follow him back up, and he sits down to eat. He eats and visits with people, then continues teaching until the sun rises, then leaves. He is almost nonchalant. Luke minimizes the miracle that just happened here! It’s as if he was wholly moved by the tragic loss, explaining in detail, but not moved at all once the young man lived.

But, it is not that he does not care about Eutychus, but rather that he shows us the proper priority in the kingdom of God. Miracles, even the most demonstrably powerful ones, are not the important thing. They are not the point. They are the

pointer. The Word is the point. The Gospel of Jesus is the point. The Messiah is the point. You don't glory in the signpost. You glory in the destination. The Jesus who lives is the destination. This resurrection, as miraculous as it is, is just too little a thing in the light of the gospel promises. Therefore, Paul teaches for hours, heals in a momentary embrace, and then teaches for hours more.

And there is no pomp and circumstance to this miracle, either. There is no shouting, no command to live, and not even a prayer that is noted. Rather, there is simply an embrace, then a statement, "His soul is in him." It is direct. It is understated. It is quiet. There is a mysterious potency in such quiet, such power perfected in weakness and whisper. This is not the difficult work of a powerful man, it is the easy work of the powerful God through a man who simply clung to the tragically fallen young man.

You see, this resurrection is an object lesson, a visual, emotional, affectional image painted in the visceral to display the King's power and victory over death itself. I can't imagine, knowing what Paul preached concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus as the center of all God's glorious work in the gospel, that this moment would have been even more potent in the hearts of its observers and hearers. Of course, Eutychus would one day die, again, but the expectation and encouragement for the church is that resurrection is a corporeal reality upon which we place our hope in the midst of suffering, entropy, and death.

In this way, Luke describes the result of this entire event, of the teaching and dialogue, the tragedy and sorrow, and the resultant restoration of life, as "immeasurably encouraging" to the church. Not just encouraging, but "immeasurably" so.

So, upon what is your courage placed today? You, who haven't seen someone raised from the dead, whose tragedies still cut deep and whose losses are still weighing heavily upon your souls? You have been called to wait for resurrection, to patiently endure while loss lingers upon you. There is only one Eutychus. My Eutychus did not rise up.

Because the reality is that we all have loved ones, dreams, and expectations which have fallen out the window and died. We all suffer loss. Everything in this world is wearing away, steadily irreversibly falling out the window.

Everything! Your body is falling. Your heart is a wind-up heart. It was wound up at birth and it is slowly losing kinetic energy, ticking downward until it stops after a finite number of ticks.

Your physical attractiveness is falling away.

Your relationships are falling away. Time and circumstances divide good friends, pulling them away like the wind blows leaves in the fall. Your family falls away. Children grow up and move away. Life changes alter your familial landscape and you die off one at a time.

Your skills are falling out the window. You can't always progress to the top of your game.

Everything your heart desires, which your soul most wants, is ebbing away like sandcastles built upon the seashore, dragged away by wave after wave after wave. Everything in your experience is receding from you. You can't hold it down. You can't grasp it. You can't keep it.

One of the things which all cultures and people hold in common is suffering and death. **Everybody suffers** and everybody dies.

And death is never welcomed in the Scripture. It is always seen as an enemy, "the last enemy to be defeated," wrote Paul in his first letter to the church in

Corinth. It is not a benign friend or a mere portal. It is a curse, a poison from the head of a viper which needed to be crushed. So God did. But the removal of its venom does not make it our buddy. Though the victory of Jesus over it has rendered its scythe into a pruning shear and black robe into a gardener's apron for His people does not make death a kind thing. It merely makes it a defeated thing.

Therefore, it is proper to fight it. We labor against the brokenness of the world, the sufferings of hunger and the pangs of disease. We seek to comfort the broken-hearted, not masochistically cheer at its arrival or stoically and heroically seek to remain aloof from it. No! Rather, the animosity of death in all its forms lead Christians to wage war against it with the full knowledge that God has ordained it for a time and that Christ has won victory over it. The sorties continue for the sake of the soldiers though the surrender has been signed.

So, we are never satisfied with death. We do not smile at the sight of that downward force, dragging our loved ones out the window one by one. We weep. We mourn. We wail. Suffering is always our enemy, and he comes for us all, and we meet him face to face in the realities of life.

Eutychus' resurrection, however, signifies that the Captain who holds the keys to Death and the Grave is coming. The victory song is getting nearer. Death is not the final chapter. It is not our destiny to suffer without cause. Our ordained suffering has a shape with an upward curve to glory. Like the Nike logo, that symbol of triumph, which falls in suffering and death, but that downward curve has a bottom, a limit, before it turns upward to ascend higher than the peace from which it began, to the higher place of glory.

As Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote so eloquently in his brilliant novel, *The Brothers Karamozov*,

“I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage,

like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man, that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.”

This Christian hope of resurrection life, “something so precious...that will justify all that has happened”, has an enormous impact on how we face and process suffering, disappointment, troubles, so it is imperative that we get this relationship between suffering and hope in the right gospel order. That is, by *treasuring* our hope, our souls rest in the justification of our present pain. Knowing that Jesus will raise us up *and* make all things right, empowers us to suffer injustice well, to hate it, to fight it rightly, and yet not be mastered by its despair.

Paul knew this firsthand. He seemed to have many tragedies, difficulties, and troubles, and often had to defend his ministry because of the presence of such difficulties. In fact, here's how his opponents challenged his gospel: “How could God be with a man when all that bad stuff happens to him? If you're an apostle, this suffering and sickness and disaster shouldn't happen!”

It's just as prevalent a presumption about suffering today, as it was then, when suffering scratches through the fantastic veneer on the mirror of reality. We even ask it of ourselves, don't we, when suffering comes? “What did I do, God, to deserve this?”

How did Paul respond to this accusation? He didn't just claim that God is simply with him, he goes further and deeper than that. He says that his sufferings are not only *not* a denial of the gospel, but rather they are a *confirmation* of the

gospel. He tells the Corinthians, “We always carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body, so that death is at work in us but life in you.”

Eutychus demonstrated, and Paul wrote the Corinthians, that this is the way the gospel works, death must precede resurrection, the cross must precede the crown, weakness must precede triumph. The way that the gospel worked in Jesus’ life is the way which it works in my life. And when Paul says, “death is at work in me” it is a metaphor for all types of death. Eutychus’ death and resurrection is a shadow of the substance to come for all Christians and for all Christian suffering.

What I mean is all types of suffering and loss are little deaths: the little deaths of your dreams, job loss and injury kill your strength; illnesses kills your career success; a traffic jam kills your punctuality; emotional turmoil and heartache kill your comforts; all the way up to the biggies of beatings and bedless nights, of divorces and dying children by which your loves and dreams of what is supposed to be die. These are the shadowy deaths which precede the resurrections of them all. He calls it ‘death working in us.’

But do you see the analogy? Just as in Jesus, death is working *for* greater life, so also it does so for the Christian. It did immediately for Eutychus, as the disciples were “immeasurably encouraged”, but I find that living in Jesus the same pattern of ministry is at work in my life. My little deaths to my own comfort, my own honor, to control, lead to greater life for others. It is love which lays down its life for one’s friends.

Now, here is where the Christian assertion that God is sovereign over our suffering becomes potent rather than pitiful. What I means is that many Christians try to answer the problem of suffering and impending death by rejecting God’s sovereignty. However, the Scripture is clear that **God ordains all**

our suffering for a reason far more glorious than we can currently grasp, for the glory of the upward curve. Eutychus' fall wasn't a parenthesis of God's plan, but a paragraph in it. Death itself, the curse for sin, was announced and executed by God, not Satan, and certainly not Man.

Yet, God is not only sovereign. He is also good. Therefore, He has also entered into that very suffering which He has executed. So, He cannot be called callous or harsh or distant. This duality of God's sovereignty over our suffering and His sharing in our suffering is essential to the assertion that suffering ultimately has some meaning. Consider: If God is out of control of history, then suffering is not part of any plan; it is random and senseless. This would be the secular view of suffering and death. On the other hand, if God Himself has not suffered, then how can we trust Him when His hands turn to afflict us?

Dorothy Sayers writes of this eloquently:

“For whatever reason, God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he [God] had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was a man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace, and thought it was worthwhile.” - *The Greatest Drama Ever Staged*

In fact, your pain preaches some object of hope, some gospel, some kind of meaning. Does it include Easter morning, or is it only Friday's darkness? How can we, then, hope in God when our Eutychus doesn't get up off the stones?

Paul gives an example for us when he writes his other letter at this time, Romans 5:3-5, “Not only this [hope in the glory of God through the gospel], but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because *God’s love has been poured into our hearts* through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

So, here Paul is saying that our losses, these empty windows of suffering, actually work to produce, through hope, a deeper experience of the love of God because the Holy Spirit has been given to us for this reason.

Have you stopped to consider how much power there is in a pinecone? I mean, what is its end result, the fulfillment of all the promise that is wrapped up in that little armored lump? A huge tree!! The promise is all in there, and out of that tree will come even more pinecones and more trees. One pinecone can fill an entire continent with millions of acres of forestland. One pinecone!!

But not unless it dies.

Not unless it falls into the ground and dies will its enormous power be released. And every human soul, made in the image of God, has infinitely more potential than a pinecone. You have the potential for endurance and wisdom and compassion and patience and character and beauty and creativity and love. But it will not be released, according to Jesus, unless you die. There will not be resurrection without death, without crucifixion. It will not be released except through the deaths, the sufferings, and the squeezing.

The Greek poet Aeschylus wrote, “**He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.**”

Unless the kernel fall to the ground and dies, it will never flourish to life.

But, how do we *know*?! How do we know that our deaths will bring a forest of beauty and glory? Well, Paul tells us! He doesn't just wish into the darkness. He explains it to the Corinthians when he writes, **“We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence.”** (NET) Ahh...there it is. Resurrection. In history. In flesh and blood and reality and time and space and tears. Eutychus' resurrection was an object lesson, demonstrating that all which Paul had told them regarding the Word of life, of Jesus of Nazareth, was true for all of them, and true for you who believe in Jesus.

Since Jesus *was* raised from the dead. Because the resurrection of Jesus happened, then it's the very meaning of history that redemption and glory and beauty and meaning and LIFE come *through* misery and suffering and injustice and death. The wine comes from the crushing, the living water through the squeezing. It's the very meaning of history that redemption comes out of devastation.

Paul had recently written of his thorn in his flesh. Some pain and misery which caused Paul to beg God to take it away, and God said “no!” He said, “My power is perfected in weakness. My grace is enough for you.”

When Jesus cried out to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane, he wasn't asking that a mere thorn in his flesh be removed, he was asking that the biggest stake ever driven through the heart of man be removed. He asked God to remove it and God said no. Why? Because “My power always comes into the world through weakness.” My power only explodes into the world through a cross. The image is built into the very fabric of nature, the nature of seed and plant. And His power will only explode in your lives and into the lives of those around you through weakness, through suffering. God wrings His divinely powerful Life through the fabric of our sufferings.

This is what Paul knew. If Jesus Christ can uncomplainingly submit to this infinite suffering and thereby have God's life wrung out through his death and explode out into our lives and into the world, then you and I can take our suffering with the same hope.

And we know, as He did, that even though he went through the horror of God's very infinite wrath poured out upon him, of suffering unimaginable for us, was endured by Him because of the joy set before Him, the exaltation which came Sunday morning, the first day of the week for which the church began to gather, the memorial of the resurrection and vindication and glory, which you will have, too, "will be raised up together with Him" *because* you fell to the ground and died these thousand little deaths.

In fact, that "because" is exactly how Paul states it to the Corinthians: **"these light and momentary afflictions are producing for you an eternal weight of glory."** The afflictions of your soul and body are producing something. They are working. They are active. And what are they producing? An eternal weight of glory. Eternal meaning and significance and goodness.

And notice that our sufferings enhance our glory. Think about that. And think about the significance that Jesus was *physically* raised from the dead, not merely *spiritually* raised up in some heavenly aura. Because what is our Christian hope? Is it just heaven? Is it simply compensation for what we've lost? And we've lost a lot! But, if the future is a new heaven *and new earth*; if the Christian hope is not just a compensation for what we've lost, but a *restoration* of new life, the life we've always really wanted; then that changes everything regarding suffering.

Here's why: Have you ever had a nightmare where somebody you loved was killed? One of those vivid, horrifying, terrible nightmares that jolt you out of a dead sleep all sweaty and out-of-breath, with a deep knot in your stomach? Then, you realize that they are not gone, that you have them back? How do you feel about them in that moment? Don't you rejoice that you have them "back"?

You see, you don't rejoice over them and love them in spite of the nightmare, but *because* of the nightmare. It has enhanced your joy in them. The nightmare is the empty window that increased the joy and love for them. It's as if all the sad things have been made untrue, and the real things made immeasurably joyful.

The resurrection of Eutychus made the Troasians encouragement immeasurable, *because* he fell out that window and died! That was the affliction which produced the encouragement as it was redeemed. In the same way, our resurrection into the life of Jesus will make everything horrible that you've ever experienced into a mere momentary nightmare, and it will infinitely and correspondingly increase your future joy and glory in a way that it would have not been increased if you had never suffered it. And that is the ultimate defeat of suffering and evil.

To say suffering will one day end is one thing, but to say that in the end evil and suffering will become the servant of your joy is quite another! Christian hope does not just compensate you for suffering, it swallows it up and masters it, making it your servant.

Being pulled up into the resurrected life of Jesus makes Death our gardener, his scythe of execution split and welded into a pruning shear to make our life blossom in a sweeter fragrance and more beautiful color than if his knife had never cut us so deeply.

How do we, then, find immeasurable encouragement? We must behold Jesus! We must fix our eyes upon this Christian hope, the new heavens and the new earth, the joy set before us so that we, too, can endure these crosses and despise the shame. We don't just accept the suffering, or accept the shame. No! We certainly don't avoid them, because they are producing glory and joy for us. Yet, we don't embrace suffering, either, like some kind of masochists, because evil is evil and suffering is our enemy who will be defeated.

But, look! See! Behold how God makes this enemy become your servant and gardener! Look at such grace! Fix your eyes on it over and over again until it pulverizes your despair! Fix your eyes on the unseen things, the *promises* of God, hope which is not yet seen, because one day they will be seen in full! For these promises are the lasting things, the things which our hearts can sense like the dawn of morning, still shadowy but promising the warming sun, and the shadows enhance the expectation and lift the soul when the sun breaks through and warms our faces.

One day there will be no more sea to pull our beloved ones away, to destroy the castles which our labors have produced, the work of our hearts, minds, and hands, because the Rock of Ages will have planted us firmly in glory, and all that God has crushed in our present afflictions will have aged the joyous wine of restoration into perfection, into the way things are supposed to be in deep and abiding joy inexpressible and full of glory, where our lives are not merely everlasting, but eternal, restored to unshakable fruition and made the way it is supposed to be.

As we behold the end of this upward curve, the life being produced and the final finish of God's glorious and gracious work in us, we behold the glorious beauty of God: death is at work in us, but life is being wrung out of it for your good and for my good by the sovereign hands of our Father who raises the dead and our Savior who makes all things new.

And in the midst of your deaths, of your sufferings, remember the God who has ordained them is also the Jesus who endured them. Run to Him as He squeezes you, for the hands that squeeze you bear the scars of your afflictions.

When I suffer, I remember to whom I am wed: I do not worship a mere man who escaped suffering by any means, but I come to a God who, according to His great mercy, ran headlong into suffering that I might know life. I come to an

older brother, the ultimate King. I come to Jesus the Victor, able to keep me by the power of His risen life.

I come to Jesus the resurrected one! The First and the Last, the Origin and the Ultimate! I come to the keeper of my faith, the holder of my inheritance, and the guardian of my soul.

Suffering could not sink Him! My shame he would not shun! Pain could not pin him down! Sin can't stand before Him and the Devil's debate dissolves in the presence of His power! Death could not defeat Him and the Grave couldn't grasp Him!

I come to the one who loves me with a love formed before the foundational fires of the universe who holds in his mighty right hand the keys to Death and to Hades. I come to the living Word, my hope.

And when the perseverant patience of God has reached its goal, and He returns to judge the living and the dead, I will see Him face to face, risen and rising, and all the sin that still is present in me and all the sins committed against me will be burned away with holy fire and all that will be left is the purest gold of all that I was meant to be and the one for whom I am meant! He has risen and He reigns and I will see His face, and my sufferings will have produced a far more glorious height with Him than if I had never lost, and this hope purifies my suffering as He is pure and justifies my sufferings as He is just! This is the Word of Life. This is the point. This is our hope. Amen.