

Pentecostal Snake-Handler Dead After Refusing Medical Treatment for Snakebite

A Kentucky snake-handling preacher who appeared in a television show about the religious practice died of a snakebite after refusing medical treatment, authorities said on Sunday.

Jamie Coots was found dead at about 10 p.m. EST on Saturday at his house in Middlesboro, Ky., according to Middlesboro Police Chief Jeff Sharpe.

Emergency personnel had gone to his home about 90 minutes earlier after getting a call, police said.

They found Coots suffering from a snakebite wound to his right hand, Sharpe said in a statement.

"After examination and discussion of possible dangers if the wound was not treated, treatment and transport to the hospital was refused," the statement said.

The emergency responders left after failing to persuade Coots to get help but returned less than an hour later, the statement said.

They "discovered Mr. Coots had passed away, apparently due to a venomous snakebite," it said.

Coots appeared in a National Geographic television show titled *Snake Salvation* about Pentecostal preachers who defy the law to use serpents as part of their religious services.

Snake-handling, which is illegal in most places, is practiced as a test of faith and guided by the theory that true believers will not be harmed.

It is particularly popular in parts of Appalachia. Middlesboro lies near the junction of Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee and is about 60 miles north of Knoxville, Tenn.

Videos on the online site YouTube credited to pastorcoots2012 depict serpent handling services at his Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name church.

They show him and congregation members dancing with snakes in their arms as music plays.

Appearing last year on ABC's *Nightline*, Coots said he had been bitten nine times, including once that cost him a part of a finger.

"If the Bible told me to jump out of an airplane, I would," he said on the show.

About a year ago, Coots was charged in Tennessee with illegally possessing poisonous snakes.

As part of a plea deal, he surrendered the snakes and his sentence of just under a year in jail was suspended, according to local media.

Editing by Ellen Wulfhorst and Jonathan Oatis

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