

“AND THEY ALL WEPT.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 20:36-38

Introduction

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Really? What about our text this morning? How can these few details from Luke's travel diary train us in righteousness, help us be more like Jesus and equip us for every good work? What does this have to do with the Gospel and salvation and eternal life? Are good byes really that important?

I love God's Word for how often it surprises me. I can read the most mundane, boring text of some factual details like this morning's text and discover God has important lessons to teach us from every page and every passage of Scripture.

These three verses are a prime example. There is more here than meets the eye, more here than just some tearful good-byes, more here than just parting is such sweet sorrow. When you come to passages like this in your reading through the Bible, passages that don't seem to give up its treasures easily, stop, pray, ask the Holy Spirit what does this mean, what does He want to say to me in this text. Pause, pray, wait patiently, reflect, meditate, listen.

Let's consider *three practical lessons* for our daily living from this text about practical daily life.

I will sum up these three lessons in three verbs: *Pray, kneel, weep(love)*.

Acts 20:36-38, Paul's parting.

Pray.

Paul preached and then he prayed for them what he had preached. Paul sealed his words with prayer. He said many serious things, many weighty things, and the only hope of success lies in the help and blessing of God.

No doubt, Paul prayed for their protection from evil and the evil one, from the fierce wolves, to be steadfast in the face of persecution, to watch over their own souls, to shepherd and care for the flock. He commended them to God and His grace.

Jesus did the same thing in the upper room after the last supper. After His many last words to His disciples we read:

John 17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ... In everything we say and do, if we desire any hope of reward, blessings, fruitfulness, we must seek it from God. We have not because we ask not. Prayer should be a central part of our daily living, even our coming and going, our good-byes. Scripture commands us to make prayer an unceasing part of our daily lives.

When Jesus taught us to pray, He taught us to pray daily. Keep the conversation with your heavenly Father going all through your day.

Romans 12:12 Be constant in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

Colossians 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

I Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

I Thessalonians 5:17-18 Pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Prayer is one of the greatest spiritual privileges we have. We ought to begin and end everything we do with prayer. We ought to take advantage of it every opportunity we can. We neglect it for the detriment of our souls.

Does that sound impossible? To be constant in prayer, to continue steadfastly in prayer? How often do we look at our screens, texts, emails, social media? That is almost without ceasing. If we can do that, we can certainly pray without ceasing.

One of the most common ways we use our screen devices is in between times, when we are transitioning from one activity to another, in those down times, when we are waiting, whether those times are thirty seconds or thirty minutes. (in the grocery line, at the doctor's office, at a stop light, between classes, during commercials, while someone else is talking, walking somewhere) Our devices have stolen all our attention, taking our attention away from something more spiritually edifying like praying.

Let's face it, it is easier to text or tweet or click like, than it is to pray.

Do you wonder that a difference there might be in our lives and our relationships and our work if we gave God some of the attention we give our devices?

What does praying without ceasing mean?

First, it means having a right sense of just how dependent we really are on God for everything. The essence of prayer is dependence. The essence of prayerlessness is independence. We don't pray because we have made an idol out of our self, we got this, we can handle this, we are good enough. The idol of our day is self-sufficiency. Our prayer life reflects either our idolatry or our theology.

Second, it means regularly, repeatedly, often, not one and done.

Third, it means not giving up on prayer. It means not deciding that prayer doesn't work, that it doesn't do any good or make a difference. Prayer always works. As the saying goes, when we work, we work; when we pray, God works. Prayer isn't what we do before we work, prayer is our first and most important work.

Don't limit prayer to just set times, meals, devotions, Sunday. If we only do that we miss out on countless other blessings of God's grace in the form of wisdom, guidance, strength, patience, physical protection which God delights to give when we ask. Do it at all those times we take for granted, even in our parting from each other (a family that prays every time they get in car).

God is a Father, He delights to hear from His children and He delights to give His children good gifts when they ask Him in faith and according to His good will.

Picture a child in a loving home with a godly father. That child will be happily devoted to his father and safely dependent on his father. That is a child's response to his father, devotion and dependence, reverence and reliance. Our heavenly Father deserves our devotion and praise, and He deserves our absolute trust and dependence. God delights when His children come running to Him all day long with hearts full of loving devotion and absolute trust.

I commend to your reading again, *The Valley of Vision*, Arthur Bennett.

Kneel.

Believers of all ages through all the ages have taken the posture of kneeling in prayer. Scripture is filled with countless examples of peasants and princes and kings, of prophets and apostles, and of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself kneeling.

All through Scripture we read about godly men and women worshipping in a way that include their bodies, bowing, kneeling, falling down, standing, raising hands, dancing, clapping. These are all ways to express worship and love to God.

Luke 22:41 Jesus withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason *I bow my knees* before the Father.

I Kings 8:54-55 Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven. 55 And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice.

Psalms 95:6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

When we are doing business with God our bodies should be in sync with our hearts.

Can you imagine a person walking into a job interview, slouching in a chair without shaking hands, and putting his feet up on the table? His body is completely out of sync with the moment. Do you think he will get the job?

Kneeling is one way we bring our bodies into sync with our hearts and minds. Our bodies can help our hearts/souls engage, wake us up, jolt us out of lazy, casual habits.

Kneeling shows humility, contriteness, earnestness. It is a sign of our seriousness. Kneeling shows submission, sacrifice, surrendering ourselves. Kneeling helps our hearts adopt an attitude of prayer.

How good it is when our children see us on our knees, a visible symbol of an invisible reality.

We can start this practice in our own personal times of prayer and worship, changing our posture, using our bodies to express our hearts to God.

We can start this in our own family devotions. Not as a gimmick but as a sign of reverence and humility in God's presence. Not as a requirement, but as a freedom.

It is a sad reality of Protestant and Reformed worship that we have removed the element of kneeling from our worship, that there isn't enough room to get on our knees before God. Mostly we just stand and sit.

Don't be afraid to lift your hands in worship, not as a requirement but as a freedom, and without judging one another. A child will raise his arms to his father when he wants to be picked up. It is sweet to me when my grandchildren do that to me. In a similar way raised hands can be a symbol of longing for our heavenly Father, for His presence.

The Bible is never hesitant about drawing attention to the posture of God's people in His presence. Can our physical actions be a distraction? Of course they can, but that's not the only option. We can also see someone worshipping and see them as displaying God's glory and not their own glory. We can see through their actions to the One the actions are directed toward.

Clearly the inward attitude of the heart is the most important thing, but we are embodied souls and there should be a harmony between our souls and bodies, our attitudes and our actions. We should employ all our members in worship and glorifying God.

Do you ever think what we will do when we are face to face in the presence of God? Do you think we will just stand there?

MercyMe - I Can Only Imagine
Surrounded by Your glory
What will my heart feel?
Will I dance for You Jesus
Or in awe of You be still?

Will I stand in Your presence
Or to my knees, will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah?
Will I be able to speak at all?

Weep.

This was like a funeral. There was not a dry eye in the house. They would see Paul no more. This was a sign of the incredible affection they had for this godly apostle. God had used him mightily in their midst and he had equipped them well for the work of the Gospel. He was spiritual father to them, these were his spiritual children.

This should be no surprise, Paul was often in tears while he was with them.

Acts 20:18-19 You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials.

Acts 20:31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

These tears were a fruitful return and a good reward for all the tears Paul shed for them and over them. Love and affection, tears, hugs and kisses are a mark of a healthy church.

God created us with emotions, with feelings; sadness and tears are natural, normal and godly.

I just finished reading Genesis and couldn't help but notice the emotions of Joseph and his brothers reunited in Egypt.

Genesis 45:1-2, 14-15 Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud.

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them.

Genesis 46:29 Joseph ... went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.

Genesis 50:1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him.

I Samuel 20:41 David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most.

Luke 19:41 When Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.

John 11:34-36 And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

These passages and all the others in Scripture that reveal the God given emotions of tears, weeping, crying, rebuke those who believe tears are a sign of weakness or defect or are unmanly, unbecoming of men. This rebukes those who say we should be unfeeling, unmoved, like stone, stiff upper lip. We Presbyterian and Reformed types have been called the Frozen Chosen for too long.

God created us this emotions and feelings, they are good and healthy. They are not to be suppressed or repressed. We are to yield to them and also to control them in proper times and ways. Yes, they can be false, manipulative.

Don't be lopsided Christians, live and love and worship with all God has given you.

There are times to laugh and times to cry, times to hug and embrace, and time to refrain. Times to sing and times to be silent. For Paul and the elders this was clearly a time to weep, to hug, to embrace, to kiss and say their final good byes. Tears are always welcome, they say we are human and we care.

And we can all rejoice that one day:

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

Conclusion and application.

At the beginning I asked how can this text help us be more like Jesus. Jesus prayed, Jesus kneeled, Jesus wept. By His Holy Spirit He leads us to do the same.

Make prayer a more constant habit all through your daily life and see what great fruit it will bring. In heaven we will see how many of our prayers God answered and we will wish we had prayed more, prayed without ceasing.

Make your body part of your worship, showing reverence and humility, personally and corporately.

Be freer in your God-given emotions. Don't think being stoic is a mark of maturity or spirituality. Let us weep with those who weep, let us love one another deeply, as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Let's express our love for each other now more than ever, we all need it.

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, fill us with your Spirit and the knowledge of your wisdom and will. Enable us to leave this place different than how we came in, to leave here enabled to walk in a manner worthy of our Lord, seeking and striving to please Him in all we do, bearing fruit in every good work, doing all our work as unto the Lord. And remove all the distractions and hinderances that keep us from you and growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.