

A SERMON FILLED WITH TEARS
March 5, 2017 morning service
Acts 20:17-38

Well for these Sundays leading up to Easter we're looking at the ten printed sermons in the book of Acts. We started at Pentecost with Peter and with Steven and now we're into Paul and his preaching on his missionary trips and we come to his third missionary trip today where he's walking forward and he preaches and it's recorded in Acts chapter 20. In just a few moments we'll begin reading that sermon in verse 17. Before we get there I want you to understand that three times in this text we find tears, weeping, and tears. Now the Bible says a lot about tears. As a matter of fact, in Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6 the Lord tells us that those who sow in tears will reap with joyful shouting. When you have tears you're going to one day say Amen and he who goes forth weeping, carrying a bag of seed shall indeed come again with a shout of joy bringing his sheaves with him. When you sow in tears, you reap in joy.

How long has it been since you cried? How long since you wept? Tears. Paul's preaching in this message is filled with tears. Now John says in Revelation 21:4 that the day's going to come when he will wipe away every tear from their eye and there'll be no longer any death or mourning or crying or pain because those things will have passed away. But we're not there yet. We're not even in the millennium yet let alone in the eternal state of heaven. So you're going to cry. You're going to weep. You're going to weep for those things that make you joyful and those things that break your heart. Paul is on the last leg of this third missionary journey when we come to Acts.

Now in chapter 19 he has been at Ephesus. I think Ephesus is one of the greatest cities in the world of ancient antiquity to visit. I love to go to Ephesus when I visit that part of the world. It is just absolutely spectacular when you're able to go to Ephesus. I believe the book of Ephesians, probably next to the book of Romans is that that encapsulates the doctrine of the New Testament as well as any other epistle that we have. It was in Ephesus that Paul wrestled with good things and bad things and the height of the gospel and lows of persecution. You see that all through chapter 19 and then into the beginning of chapter 20. Paul leaves after three years and goes on in the missionary trip, goes northwest and comes back, and he stops in the town of Miletus and he calls for the elders at Ephesus, for the church leaders. They are some 28 to 30 miles away. Let's just say for round numbers, 30 miles. He sends a runner and says, "Go get the leader." They didn't bring everybody that was a Christian but in that city God had done a great work and sent out many church planters.

As a matter of fact, I believe that the seven churches of Revelation were planted out of this church. I don't have biblical text for that but I just know there was a great work in Ephesus and there were many leaders and church planters. Paul said, "Go get them." He didn't want to go there himself because he was wanting to hasten to get back to Jerusalem before Passover. So they walked 30 miles, gathered up the elders, the pastors, the overseers, the bishops. If you want to know more about all of that you

come tonight and I'm going to talk about it. They brought all of those church leaders back to Ephesus. Now we don't know how many there were but they came back to Ephesus and the Bible tells us when they got there, having walked those 30 miles, that they met with the Apostle Paul and this is what he said to the church elders from Ephesus when they came to Miletus for a pastor's conference. Acts 20, verse 17:

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them [here's the message], "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

"And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.¹

Paul calls these elders and he has a pastor's session. To all the leaders he says some things to them and interspersed among that three times we find his tears. Anyone that pastors a church that does not weep is not a shepherd. Anyone who tries to teach

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a Sunday School group and does not weep they've missed the mark of God. Anyone who tries to serve God and minister to the church and does not at some time have tears fall from his eye socket with great joy does not know the fullness of the Holy Ghost. God puts an emotion within us when we do the work of God. When you do that work there are times when your tear ducts open and then let loose that salty product that runs down your face and causes drainage to come out of your nose and you snort and you cry and you wipe. Often people visit my office and they just begin to talk and there's things pent up. They'll quickly say, "Pastor, do you have...?" Yes I do. And we slide a box of tissue out and we weep together.

What caused Paul to weep at Miletus recounting everything that had happened with the leaders in Ephesus? Well he cried three times and so I want to build this message around these tears. I could preach for a year out of this one sermon. First of all I find in Paul's life the tears of a broken spirit, a broken spirit. In verse 19 he says that he served the Lord with humility and with tears and with trials which came upon him through the plots of the Jews. Paul faced persecution. He preached boldly. He called everyone in Ephesus that would listen. He called them to repentance. How did Paul do that? How in the world did he stand up against foes that came against him to try to kill him? How in that did he preach with boldness? How did he call people to repent and see revival fires come in Ephesus? He was mastered by Christ. He was broken. He had wept to the place that he was over himself. He was as he said in verse 22 bound in the spirit, not in the flesh, not in some way of thinking himself. He was going to Jerusalem bound in the spirit.

In verse 24 he said, "I am dead to my own desires. I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself." You see, Paul came to have a broken spirit. He got over himself. He was mastered of Christ. He was a man under authority and, dear friend, until you get under authority, God will never use you for His glory. You've got to be broken of spirit, coming under the authority of God. Get over yourself and get under authority. There's all kinds of authorities. Wherever you work, somebody's over you. Get under authority. In your home there's authority. Get under authority. If you are a student in a school there is authority. Get under authority. If you're a member of a church there's authority. Get under authority. If you're a citizen get under authority.

If you go out to eat after this worship time, whatever restaurant you go into, whoever is waiting your table, you are under their authority. You say, "Well I'm not either." Well, yes you are because that person is working for someone who oversees that establishment and you just go in and try to rearrange all the tables. Somebody will tell you whether you can or cannot do that and if you go in saying, "Well I know better than they know," then you are a rebel.

When you are a rebel – God never uses a rebel for His glory. When you are of a rebellious spirit rather than a broken spirit, rebellion will – I'm amazed. I see people, they've just got this rebellious attitude and everywhere you go, they're just tearing stuff up everywhere you find them. You can stick them in the choir. They'll mess up the choir. You stick them on a committee. They'll mess up a committee. You can put

them in a job. They'll mess up the job. Why? Because it's all about them. Friend, you've got to get under authority.

As I've told you I don't know how many times, until you are under what God's put over you, you'll never be over what God's put under you. Paul knew what it was to be bound in spirit and his weeping is when he came to that moment of brokenness. If God could just root out the rebellious spirit from His church we could see His glory come but often we are so stiff-necked and want to be in charge of everything, we do not get under authority. Friend, it just marks your rebellion. When you have a rebellious spirit, oftentimes God will just let you go. You'll tear up everything you get around but there are times when God will come and crush you to teach you of that rebellion.

I read this week of a man who said he was riding into a downtown area looking for a parking space. He said he saw a sign. I've never seen a sign like this but he said the sign said, "Don't even think about parking here." He said, "I was so rebellious that I thought about it but I didn't do it." You see, rebellion begins in just the way you think and then you take action. What had happened to the Apostle Paul? He was not bound to the flesh. He was bound to the spirit. He counted himself – he said, "I'm over me. I'm just here to serve God and be under authority and whatever God wants." Let me tell you, friend, when you come under authority get ready. God is about ready to lift you up and the glory is going to shine but you've got to die to self first and often that takes weeping, weeping, weeping.

Paul, we see the tears of a broken spirit. Secondly, we find in verse 31, we find that Paul says, "Therefore, be on the alert. Remember that night and day for a period of three years when he was in Ephesus, I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. I admonished you and I was weeping. I had tears in my admonition to you. You see, Paul didn't just have a broken spirit, he also had a broken heart. His heart was broken for the church of the living God and its future. That's why he's calling these elders together. He said, "I'm concerned about the church."

Now hear me. All of us who love God ought to love His church. When I say His church I mean all of the believers of God together. Then you bring that down to a local church. He called the elders from Ephesus and those small groups had small house churches that met together and these elders and leaders came. You ought to be concerned for your church and if you're a member at Olive, listen to me. You should have a broken heart for Olive Baptist Church. For all the people, yes. For folks you know at other places, yes. But I'm telling you, you ought to have a broken heart for this place. It's your church. It's where God's called you for this season of your life. Paul said, "My heart was broken. Be on guard," he said in verse 28.

There are three things he said about the church in this text that I just want to lift up to us. Number one, he saw the church purchased. He was broken about the purchased church. Look at it in verse 28. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which he what? Purchased. Purchased. That word's only used five times in the

Greek New Testament. Purchased with His own blood. This is the most interesting word. Now the word purchased here is not like buying a loaf of bread where you purchase it. This is not like being ransomed. This is a different word. This is a word used, as I said, only five times in the Greek New Testament and it literally means to make around oneself.

Here's what God did. With His own blood, He brought the church and made it around Himself. Who's the chief cornerstone? Christ. Who's the head? Christ. Who's the foundation? Christ. He makes the church. He doesn't make the church around you. Get over you. He doesn't make the church around me. Get over me. He makes the church around Himself and He purchased it with His own blood. It is the church purchased.

Let me tell you, friend, the only way you'll ever get saved is when you run to Calvary and say the blood of Christ washes me as white as snow and God shed His own blood. That's an interesting phrase. There Jesus is God and God is Christ and He is one together. We see that He purchased. He drew us around Himself and Paul said, "Be careful. Be careful. I'm weeping that the church would understand whose it is." Olive doesn't belong to you. Olive does not belong to me. It is built by God around Himself. It's His church and He can get along fine without me and without you but He desires to take every one of us that will come in brokenness and put us in as a building block wherever we might need be for that time.

In our Vision 25 time we were talking. I brought up two or three names. We were talking and I brought up Bob Davis. Bob oversaw the building of this building. He used to work out at Monsanto and helped build that plant. He built a plant in England. He built a plant in Guntersville, Alabama. He was quite a guy. I've seen him walk up in these rafters. No neck Bob. He didn't have a neck. He was like this. He was the chairman of the pulpit committee. He brought me here.

Dennis Wilson. We talked about Dennis. I looked over at the young man who I had selected to be the chairman of this committee and he had a quizzical look. I said, "You don't know either one of those guys, do you?" He said, "I've heard their name but I don't know who they are." You see, God used Bob in a season but God doesn't have to have Bob Davis to run this church. He'll raise up somebody else. Dennis, my soul, probably nobody was a greater disciple maker than Dennis Wilson. Scores of young men in this church that he touched but let me tell you, I was with a group of over 65 of us around a campfire the other night and I guarantee you, 60% of those men wouldn't know who Dennis Wilson was. There was a bunch of young men that had been won by young men.

You see, God used Dennis but He didn't have to have Dennis make this church go. He doesn't have to have you. He doesn't have to have me. We are privileged. We are privileged. Amen? Don't make me start singing. Somebody say Amen. We are privileged to be a part of the glorious work of the kingdom. Amen? Paul had tears. He had a broken heart for the purchased church that God had put around himself.

Secondly, Paul had a broken heart for the church attacked. Not only was the church purchased but the church that was going to be attacked. Notice he said the plot of the Jews had come against him but notice the warning he said in verse 29. "Listen, pastors. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them." He said, "Have a broken heart about the church attacks. There is one that's external and one that's internal." That one that is external in verse 29 he said savage wolves. Paul said, "When I leave, savage wolves are going to come." Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 15 he likened the false prophets to wolves. Those that will come in the church will be those that Paul said in II Corinthians 11. I was reading in my quiet time this morning and it kind of jumped off the page at me. In II Corinthians 11 Paul said, "Be very careful of those who have another different spirit and preach a different gospel."

Savage wolves will try to come in among you, false prophets with another gospel. Then he said also from inside of you that men will arise. These are the internals. These are the disciples of division. This is Satan's great way of getting at the church. He's the sinister minister of misinformation. It's who he is. Mean as hell. He'll drive a wedge and draw people not away, no, no, no. They won't leave. They come stay and divide and stay and divide and stay and divide. They're not for the good of the church. They're for the good of themselves. They're not trying to build God's kingdom, they're trying to build their own kingdom.

Paul had a broken heart about the church attacked. Dear friend, I was talking to a retired Assembly of God preacher yesterday. He said, "Pastor, how are you doing?" I said, "Good." He said, "What's your boy doing now? I knew your son years ago. I used to bring my grandkids over there and play ball at Olive." I said, "Well, he's at Liberty Law School." He said, "Praise the Lord." He said, "Ten years from now just take this as a word of prophecy. The church is going to need more lawyers than they do preachers." He didn't laugh. He said, "If something doesn't happen, we're sure going to need a lot of people to get a lot of Christians taken care of with laws that are going to come against the church." I said, "Well he'd probably lock me up but I don't know."

Friend, I'm telling you, there are externals that come in against the church. Be concerned but have greater concern for those inside that would divide from within. That's the wicked crowd. Making disciples of themselves. Be very careful. Paul had a broken heart. He said, "You guys get ready for the wolves from without and the demonic teachers from within."

Paul said, "I've got a broken heart about the church purchased, the church attacked, and thirdly the church supported." That's what he said in verses 34 and 35. Look at this. He got down. He said, "You guys know. I'm telling you, you know that I was a bi-vocational preacher here in Ephesus. I worked, used my own hands, made my way. You didn't have to pay me anything." Paul is not setting a doctrine here. There are people today that believe every pastor ought to be bi-vocational and that there

should be no one but Paul spoke to this. Those that live by the gospel and worthy of double pay and so he has that but there are times that men will work by their own hands and Paul said, "You know when I was among you that I made my own way," and then verse 35, "in everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus Himself." Now these words are not recorded in the gospels anywhere. These are like John said, that if everything Jesus said or did was written down, the whole of the sky wouldn't be enough to write everything Jesus did.

Here's something outside the gospel. You don't find this in the gospels but Paul said, "We know Jesus, what He taught us, it is more blessed" to what? "Give, than it is to receive." Here Paul has got a broken heart not only for the church purchased, not only for the church, he's got a broken heart for the church supported because there are many who come and never give. Paul said, "They've never learned the deep discipleship of being a giver." I wrote it. I tweeted it. Now I'll illustrate it.

I sat in the Jacksonville Airport with these shoes on Thursday. I love to get my shoes shined in the airport. It's almost like a foot washing. It just feels so good to me. When I played basketball for Paul Cooley, if your shoes were not shined you could not get on the bus. So that's just always been a part of who I am, so shine your shoes. I didn't shine these last night because I got them done in the airport.

Tony was there. He had a badge on. "Pray about everything." That's what his badge said. So I began to talk to Tony and Tony said, "You're a preacher." I said, "Yeah." He said, "T-O-T." He said, "Tell them Sunday, T-O-T." I said, "What is that, Tony?" "Tithe, offering, and total commitment." I said, "Say it one more time." He said, "Tithe, offering..." I'm telling you, people walking by, he's like preaching loud. "Tithe, offering, and total commitment." Are you a tither? God gave His all. He'd ask you to support the work of the kingdom with a tithe. Then with an offering. What's that? That's over and above. Then total commitment. I mean giving your all to God.

You say, "Pastor, I'm in trouble financially." Wowie, I'm glad you brought that up. On the back of your worship guide today is called "Financial Peace University." We're starting two new classes. There's a table out there. If you want to get your finances – this is one of the finest discipleship programs you could ever be a part of. As a matter of fact, if you want to study with me I'm taking it Tuesday morning. All the staff at Olive Baptist Church is taking it on Tuesday morning starting in two weeks. If you want to come study with us, if you have mornings off on Tuesday, we're doing that at 9:30. We'll be here for 90 minutes. All the staff's going to do that. You say, "Do they have a choice?" Nope. Well they do. They can either work somewhere else or work here for free. That's what they can do. We're going to train them and help them with that.

If you'd like to join us, just sign up. Then there's one starting this Wednesday night and you can sign up for that. It'll help you. I'm telling you, Dave Ramsey's stuff is great. It will help you. It's not a program to teach you to be a tither. It's to get your

finances in order so that you can be blessed and take care of yourself as well as be a giver. I'd encourage you to be a part of that.

Paul had a broken heart, tears for the church purchased, the church attacked, and the church supported. There's one last thing we see in the tears of Paul. That is when he finished he said, "You're not going to see me anymore." They wept. Then verse 36 when he said these things they knelt down and he prayed with all of them. Oh my. They began to weep and embrace Paul and kissed him over and over. This speaks to the tears not of a broken spirit, not of a broken heart, but of a broken relationship.

Last week our deacons had the annual widow's banquet for the ladies in our church. They're right at 300 ladies who come to church here who are widowed. We had over 100 of them come for that Saturday banquet. I sat there with Liz and on the way home as we were driving I said, "You know, honey, I just looked around that room today and I just counted the times over almost 27 years how many of those ladies I've walked the walk with them." I didn't do them all but many of those ladies I walked in front of that casket to the gravesite and preached that funeral. I put my arm around them and tried to pray and comfort. It's a hard day when you give up a loved one. It's a broken relationship and you weep. You weep.

My mother's birthday is this week, or next Monday. I'm going this week to drive up to see her for a couple of days. I talked to her last night and I said, "We've got some things we've got to get squared away while I'm there." She said, "I know." We'll do it. We'll have a family meeting on Thursday and we'll get it taken care of. I said, "Yes, ma'am."

One of my buddies called me the other day, Rex Creswell. He's one of the closest friends I've got from high school. He said, "Ted, I know the day's coming when one of your parents are going to die and you can't get here for six or seven hours and that call's going to come." He said, "If you'll call me I'll go be there til you get here." That's a friend. Many of you have walked that road that I'll walk one day if I live longer than my parents. You weep over a broken relationship.

Paul was not dying but he was leaving and they would never see him again. You see, there are other relationships that get broken, not just in death but we have people once a month around here that get old and have to move where their kids are. They come tell me. They say, "Pastor, this is my last Sunday. I'm going to be with my children," in Alpharetta or Dallas or Birmingham or wherever. "You'll see my face no more."

I had one come by last week and said, "I want to know how much do I owe on my commitment for Relaunch. I'm leaving. You'll see my face no more but I want to make good on what I pledged." I went in to see Charlotte and she gave me a number and I came back. I said, "The best I can tell it's three-quarters of a million dollars is what it is." They said, "You better go check again." I said, "Well alright."

The shortest verse in the Bible is in John 11. Jesus did what? Wept. He wept because his friend had died. He wasn't weeping over Lazarus. He just took care of that. But he was weeping over the broken hearts of the people around. They knelt down. Boy, that is a picture of what the church ought to be. Did you see that at the end of that text? They wept and hugged and in their culture they kissed him. It was a broken relationship. Not broken in a bad way but we'll see you no more. Not on this side. We know we're going to see them on the other but here. Days turn into weeks and weeks into years and years into decades and you still are here and they're there. They held onto each other. Let me tell you, friend, that is what the people of God do is when relationships are broken, they hold onto one another. They check on each other. They love each other. They weep.

One of my dear friends in this church. He's been here just as long as I've been just about walking through a deep valley. I was out riding with my wife to a dinner. After we got done we were going by where these people lived and I said, "Let's go in." She said, "Why? You've already talked to them." I said, "Yeah, but I just want to go by." I knocked on the door and when they came to the door I said, "I know we've already talked but I just want to come give you a hug tonight." Those of you that know me well know that I don't hug much. I just took them in my arms and we cried together. Then I went home and watched the news and went to bed.

Don't miss it. Don't miss it. When you see broken relationships – I don't mean in a bad way. I'm not talking about divorce or that kind of thing. I'm talking about when you see death or sometimes – you go on a mission trip, you leave those people. You'll hear it. They'll tell you at the airport. We'll never see you until we get to heaven. You love those people. You've just met them. Don't miss it. Sometimes just hold them and weep. It'll do you good and it'll build the body.

Paul went and got on the ship and headed off and they never saw him again because he wound up at Jerusalem, got back on a ship. He wound up at Rome. Finally in Spain. History tells us he died a martyr of death.

You want to know what's going on in glory today? The elders of Ephesus and the Apostle Paul are around the throne waiting on you to come. Are you going? Nobody's going? Are you going? I thought we were fixin' to have the biggest harvest we've ever had. Your momma's there, your little brother's there, the question is are you going to be there?

In a moment Jamie's going to sing a song and I'm going to stand right here. The church is purchased. Are you a part? Have you been saved? He called us to repentance. Jesus died for you. The church. There's a warring factor in there. Are you fighting the good fight? The church supported. Are you part of the family? Have you joined Olive? Have you moved your membership here? I had some people tell me this morning. They said, "Pastor, in a week or two we're coming." I had some folks this week tell me, "We're going to come. We're going to be a part. We know that's our

place.” Amen. I don’t know what God’s doing in your heart. Some of you may just need to come kneel in the altar and weep. That’s not a bad day.

In the next service I have a family coming and we’re going to kneel and I’m going to pray over them because the father has one of the toughest surgeries coming in a few days that he’s ever faced. He sent me an email and said, “Pastor, I’m bringing my whole family and I want to ask. We’ve been coming here a long time. We want to ask if you would lay your hands on me and pray.” We’re going to weep together in the next service. Some of you may need to come weep. The tears, they’re not bad. The call of God’s in this room and we simply invite you to come.