

Weeping for Souls

by Ian Goligher

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a true spiritual concern for the souls of men, which is exemplified in the lives of Elisha, Jeremiah, Jesus, and Paul, and encourages the listener to get a burden for souls by seeing the sin, hell, and the cross.

Duration: 36:46

Scripture: Genesis 6:13-14, 1 Kings 19:10-11, Jeremiah 1:6-7, Jeremiah 9:1, Jeremiah 9:17-18, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Evangelism", "Compassionate Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having a broken heart and a broken spirit when delivering the message of God. He uses the examples of Elisha and Jeremiah, who both wept and were deeply moved by the lost souls around them. The preacher highlights the need for Christians to have a genuine burden for the salvation of others, rather than just having knowledge of the Bible. He calls for a return to a heartfelt and compassionate approach to sharing the gospel.

Transcript

I'm going to choose a text tonight from this 8th chapter in 2nd Kings and that means that once I give a little bit of background, we're going to be dealing with this one specific portion rather than the whole account. 2nd Kings 8 and verse 11. The verse begins with a comment regarding Hazeiel, who was the prime minister of Syria, sent to take a message to Elisha.

We're told in verse 11 that he settled his countenance steadfastly until he was ashamed and the man of God wept. In this chapter we get another sight into the dealings of Syria and for some very obscure reason, Elisha is out of his usual orbit. He's way up in the north in Damascus in the land of Syria and it would seem a strange thing that this man who is a prophet to God's people is now in the land of Syria.

Nevertheless, he's there and when he is there, he is approached by this man Hazeiel about the king Ben-Hadad's health. He is seriously ill and the question is, will he live or will he die? He came asking, will he live? And at the end of the interview, we find Elisha, the man of God, bursting into tears. His tears were due to the spirit of prophecy that was given to him and the message that this man Hazeiel would soon become the king of Syria and that he would be a terrible dictator king and a very destructive king to destroy the nation of Israel.

And Elisha's weeping over Haziel's future persecution of Israel is really our focus tonight. There are so many other things here that we could focus upon but we want to consider these tears. More can be gleaned of a man's tears by times than by his words.

One of our ministers, the Reverend Red Dodson, he's an associate pastor in Malvern, Pennsylvania, was calling on a family who had just gone through a very tragic bereavement. It was his first visit to the home after the news of a death in the family. And he said on his way there, he never felt so inadequate in all his life to know what to say to the family in their bereavement.

And as he pulled up in his car and went to the door, he felt so totally inept. And he said all that he did, he went into the people, gave a hug or two, sat down and wept, just wept with the family that were weeping. And in reality his tears said far more than any words could ever say.

And thereby his ministry to that people meant far more than a whole lot of words. And here in this case where we have Elisha, this sermon comes to us tonight by observing his tears. These remarkable words, and the man of God wept.

A week ago, as you know, I was in Calgary. And on the Saturday night we had a men's prayer meeting. And it was a prayer meeting punctuated by many tears.

There were teenage boys, 16 years, some a little older, who prayed extensively in agony of soul. It was no sham, it was no pretense, it was a genuine burden of heart. I have been to many homes where mothers and fathers sob and weep because of children that are wayward.

They are heartbroken, they are at their wits end, and they have pleaded with God. And their tears tell you far more than any words could tell you. Now what Elisha was weeping about in this instance was that Hazael, when he would become king, he would use the throne of Syria to launch a campaign of terror and butchery against the nation of Israel.

And you'll notice in the verse 12, when Hazael asked the question, the very leading pointed question, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. Their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children and rip up their women with child. Now Hazael, he went into denial.

Hazael, who as yet was not on the throne, he was not yet the king of Syria, he could not see himself doing such a thing, and he replied in verse 17, saying, What am I, a dog, to do such a thing as this? But Elisha, having a word from the Lord on the matter, foresaw the evil that he would do, and therefore the tears that he was weeping. Now this is the mark of the godly man who sees the evil even before it comes. Now it's not a mark of unusual spiritual discernment to weep over something that already has happened.

It's not a mark of someone who is astute and spiritually wise when the evil has already arrived on our doorstep. But whenever you can foresee that a certain decision or course of action will lead to destruction and lead to disaster and causes you great concern of heart, then of course you know that he's leading the wrong way. And of course there are many that we observe and we see them as the prodigal.

And we can see that their way is the way of sowing to the flesh and they will reap what they have sown. And they go into the far country and they will come to ruin. And therefore the heartache is heavy and this is what makes you to weep.

Now this may be you. This may be you broken over lost souls in your life. Someone very close to you.

Someone very near to you. And as you watch and as you observe, your heart is torn. Or if you flip the coin, maybe there is someone weeping over you and they see your waywardness.

They see the course that you're on and they plead with you and they weep with you. And you wonder why. Why are you so concerned about me? Why are you anxious about me? And you don't see it, just as Hazael didn't see it.

Hazael protested, Am I a dog that I would do such a thing? And Elisha insisted that he would become the instrument of such evil and terror against the nation of Israel. This brokenness of heart comes because the spiritual man or woman can see the evil before it comes. And I wish there was more of it.

It has been the cry of the godly from the time of Cain. What a heartbreak it must have been when Cain rebelled and went out in a rebellious attitude, slaying his brother. There was the heartbreak of a man on the wrong course.

What a heartbreak to Noah, building the ark and warning of the judgment to come. But who would enter except his own family? The Christian church needs to be broken over the evils of the world and this nation and young people that go astray. Alas that many are so dry-eyed and careless today in the Lord's church.

Let me set before you these observations and I pray the Lord will give us something of the brokenness of heart that Elisha had and that we will see in the Bible tonight. The church can fall into two evils. The evil of no emotion.

No emotion whatsoever. Coldness and decay. Or a false emotion.

An emotion that is of the flesh driven by a frenzy of man-made promoted gimmicks. But then there is that true gospel emotion. A broken heart.

The brokenness of spirit. A burden that comes from the Lord that is laid upon your heart and my heart because like Elisha we can see where souls are heading. We can see the evil that is coming and it tears our heart and it drives us to tears.

Now this can be seen from the examples of this brokenness of heart for the lost. We have this example of Elisha here in this verse 11 and if you go back to verse 11 you'll notice the exchange of looks. You have the look of Haziel.

He settled his countenance steadfastly. You know that uncomfortable moment when you lock eyes in a conversation and of course these are two opponents and there's a locking of eyes and there is that uncomfortable split second. And you know what he's thinking and he knows what you're thinking and there's an exchange of communication with eye contact without words which says it all and you'll notice that this man Haziel he settled his countenance steadfastly until he was ashamed.

He knew what was in his heart. There was murder in his heart. His plot was to murder Ben-Hadad the king of Syria and take the throne and then launch a campaign of terror against Israel.

And Elisha flushed out that very thought of his heart. And then as Haziel gazed into the eyes of Elisha and Elisha looked back tears swelled up in Elisha's eyes and he wept. Now this insight given to Elisha by the spirit of prophecy stirred his heart to the breaking point.

He was a man who felt the message that he was delivering. It was not just theory. It was reality.

And I say that this is the weakness of the evangelical, the Christian church today. That we have the doctrine we have the Bible in our hand we have the truth but where is the heart to deliver that truth with a broken heart and a broken spirit? Does it reach our hearts that souls are lost? Does it reach our hearts when we remember that there are those who do not come to church do not hear the gospel have no time for our Lord Jesus they're living in their sins and if they die in their sins that they're lost? Does it move our hearts? Another example is Jeremiah. Jeremiah is well known as the weeping prophet.

Now he's a genuine prophet because we know that in chapter 1 when God called him there was a sense Lord, who am I to go and speak to these people? Jeremiah was not one of these self-starting, self-promoting men. He was a man that abased himself and humbled himself and said, Lord, how can I stand before these people? And in chapter 1 of Jeremiah the Lord promised that he would be with them and give them strength and give them the words. And then in Jeremiah chapter 9 you'll see this man broken in heart and pleading with the people.

Jeremiah 9 verse 1 Oh, that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. And you have Jeremiah standing outside the temple gate as the people file into the temple. He's preaching to them the message of God's wrath because of idolatry upon the nation.

And he's weeping. He is a man moved by what that he is preaching. And I say this is the missing element in the Lord's church today.

Can we really be a faithful messenger with a hardened, careless heart? The next example of course is our Lord Jesus. And as I think of Elisha weeping I think of our Lord Jesus that day that he wept over the city of Jerusalem. That day when he entered on the very last week when he came into view of the city of Jerusalem and he saw the city before him.

He wept for he knew the destruction that would come upon her. Now he didn't weep for himself even though that week they would reject him and they would crucify him. But he wept for the people.

And there is that great example again. Now I want to bring you now to another example in Acts 20. The example of the Apostle Paul.

Acts 20 and verse 31. Here he is speaking to the elders of Ephesus. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I cease not to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Here is a theologian with a heart. Here is a man who is moved by the message. Here is a man who has given us fourteen letters in the New Testament.

A giant of intellect. But his heart is melted with a burden for the souls of men. He is ministering approximately two years in this area of Ephesus.

But he said for the space of three years I cease not to warn everyone night and day with tears. The missing element in the church today. Then as you go over to Romans chapter 9 here is another statement by the Apostle Paul that ought to really alert us.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not. My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. Now if you were to preach this in the modern church today they would say, but that's not Christianity.

Christianity is about joy. Christianity is about entertainment. Christianity is about having a good time.

Christians are not supposed to be burdened. They are not supposed to be sad. Here is the man who built churches in the New Testament.

And he bore with him night and day. He bore with him continually a heart that was born with sorrow. And then the amazing statement of verse 3. For I could wish that myself were accursed or separated from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.

Now that is a text that has puzzled me over and over and over. But I think that the operative word in that text is the word could. Paul doesn't say that he would.

He could. But it's impossible. It's impossible for Paul to take the place of a lost soul.

But such is the burden and the passion and the emotion within his own soul as he thinks of his countrymen. He would, if he could, take their place. And I tell you, that's an expression of great concern and heaviness of heart for the lost.

And that is the missing element in the church of the Lord Jesus today. And I preach to myself tonight. And I have preached this sermon to myself over and over as I have thought about it.

Sometimes I make the excuse by saying I'm not a very emotional person. In one way, I'm thankful I'm not one of these people that's hyper one moment and down in the valley the next. In some ways, that's a good thing.

But I have to be honest. Do I really have the burden, the true spiritual concern for the souls of men that this Bible exemplifies? Whether you take it from the life of Elisha who was concerned for his countrymen and the judgment that was coming upon them. Or you take it from a Jeremiah, the weeping prophet outside the temple as he knew the judgment that was going to come upon them as they would be carried into exile for their sin.

Or the Lord Jesus as he wept over Jerusalem. Or Paul the Apostle as he says these things of this continual heaviness and sorrow of heart. Or are we just fluffing along in a western, what is called by writers today, this post-modern Christian age in a new era which says, well, but that's not the church today.

That's the problem. And it seems that we have lost this element of the burden for a lost soul. Now how do you get, how do you get a burden as these examples show to us? How do you get to the place where you are genuinely moved with a spiritual concern for the souls of your family, your neighbors, your friends, your country? Three things.

You need a sight of sin. Paul deals with that in Romans 1. He calls it wrath, and he calls it judgment upon sin. And if we listen to the modern day gobbledygook that God is a God of love and he does not judge men for sin, then the modern day church will not have a burden.

There will be no need for prayer meetings where people weep over souls because God doesn't judge sin today. The other thing we need is a sight of hell. What is it for a soul to close his eyes in this world and open up the eyes of his spiritual being in eternity, in torment, in a lake of fire, separated from God without hope for all time? The third thing is a sight of the cross.

Because if we really have an evangelical heart, an evangelistic spirit of love for the souls of men, it will be that which drove our Savior to the cross. If that is the love that moves us, it must be a love that comes from the cross. And as we gaze upon that cross, we see what sin has done.

We see what the judgment of God is upon His own Son. And we see the tremendous love of God in Christ Jesus as He became a substitute for sinners. And as we gaze upon that cross, it ought to melt our stony heart.

It ought to make us see that the world is vanity and the wisdom of God is wrapped up in that cross. The power of God is in that cross, not in the gimmicks of men. And the modern-day church has turned to the gimmicks and the fads and the modern-day notions of how to build churches.

But if we are going to have what these biblical examples present to us of Elisha and Jeremiah and our Lord and Paul, then we need to go to the cross and say, Lord, break my heart and melt my heart and give me right from the cross a heart that is moved for the souls of men. And if we be the same New Testament Christians of the same brand, the same spirit, as the Apostle Paul, then that's the burden that we must needs have. Now, I preach to myself tonight, and I must say that my heart is hardened.

I must say that it's easy for me to be content and say, well, I have preached the Word of God faithfully. I have held up the true doctrines of the Gospel. I have sought to defend the faith.

I have sought to guard and shepherd the flock. I have sought to be faithful in every aspect of my duties as a pastor in this congregation. I have sought to comfort the sick and visit them.

I have sought to be faithful in all those ways. But, is my heart hardened to the point that I can watch men and women come and go without Christ, and I am not moved, and we as a church are not moved? Ought we not to have prayer meetings where we are groaning with God, lamenting that we are not seeing men converted by the power of the Gospel? It would be easy. It would be easy in this age to say, well, we are not a contemporary church. It would be easy to say, well, we are not going down the modern road of gimmickry.

But, do we have what the early Christians had? Do we have a brokenness amongst the people of God where we weep for the souls of men? And if not, why not? And the man of God wept. That tells me a lot about Elisha. This is going to be my final message on Elisha tonight.

This is a closing word, a closing tribute testimony to this man who prayed at the beginning of his ministry, Lord, give me a double portion of the Spirit! And God gave him tears. The charismatics say today that if God gives you a double portion of the Spirit, you'll bounce twice as high in the pulpit. That means Elisha was twice as broken as Elijah.

That's what we ought to be praying for. Now, this brokenness ought to be also seen as the vindication of Elisha's ministry. Hazeal had protested.

He says, am I a dog? What do you think of me? Saying that I'm going to rage this campaign of terror against Israel? No need for these tears, Elisha. Tush! Tush! Put away those tears! There's no need for them. Elisha knew.

And when you read on through the book of 2 Kings, you're going to find that this man, Hazael, comes up many times, and yes, he did fulfill a campaign of terror against Israel. Let me give you just some of the key verses of that campaign. Chapter 10 and verse 32.

In those days, the Lord began to cut Israel short. And Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel. So here are Elisha's words coming true.

A vindication of the man's burden. A vindication of his tears. And then in chapter 12 and verse 17.

Then Hazael, king of Syria, went up and fought against Gath and Tukut. And Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. So he not only troubled Israel, but he troubled Judah right to Jerusalem.

And it goes on to talk of the battles that he fought right there. And chapter 13 verse 3. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and delivered them into the hand of Hazael, king of Syria, into the hand of Benadad, the son of Hazael, all their days. And then the last one, verse 22 of chapter 13.

But Hazael, king of Syria, oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. There's a vindication of the burden of Elisha and the tears that he wept before Hazael at that time. So we find that Elisha was found a true prophet.

Every word that he spoke came true. And I assure you tonight that when we speak from this Bible in the name of the Lord, and when we speak that God judges sin, that there is a hell for sinners, that there's a day of judgment for the wicked, that there's a day when Christ shall return and separate the sheep from the goats, this is a true word which shall be fulfilled. Elisha was a faithful prophet.

He wept tears out of real concern, out of love for the Lord's people, out of love for the Lord's name. He was faithful to his people. He was faithful to Hazael, though he wouldn't listen.

He was faithful to God. And as we preach this message that God judges sin, that God is a holy God against sin, we will be found faithful. I was reading this week about L. E. Maxwell, that president of Prairie Bible Institute of 60 years, that at one point he took a survey of the students, and he asked, by what means were you converted? And a number of options that they may answer were, was it the love of God? Was it, you know, a whole list of things? And 75% of the students at that time under that survey answered that what moved them to become a Christian was the fear of God's wrath.

The old preaching of God's judgment upon sin. That's what brought them to faith in Christ. We're told today that we're not supposed to preach fear, you preach love.

You preach God's goodness, not God's hatred of sin. And if you want to build your church, you want to add men to the cause of Christ, you don't use fear tactics. Well, Elisha preached fear, and Paul preached fear.

He said, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. And that's the way that he was faithful. We find also that Elisha was rewarded.

This is our final closing message because very soon Elisha was with the Lord. You'll find in chapter 13 that Elisha himself became ill of a disease, died from it, went to be with the Lord. He didn't go to heaven in a chariot of fire as Elijah did.

His body was placed in a grave. But he in no wise will lose his reward for being a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus. When we weep over souls, when we preach with a burden for the lost, when we warn men with tears, not tears of some kind of evangelical spite, but of evangelical fervor and of hearts that are aching for the conversion of sinners, we will be found faithful and rewarded.

And we will stand before the Lord and receive that well done, thou good and faithful servant. This is also seen from the power of brokenness of heart for souls. There is something lacking in the church today that the church is powerless.

No souls being saved. Few lives being changed. I remember some of our ministers, the founders of our denomination back in Northern Ireland.

They said that when God was moving in those years in a mighty way, if one week went by without a soul being converted, they were miserable. They went into a heart-searching time wondering, what is wrong? Why is God not working? Why is God not moving? Those were times of God's power and grace working in hearts. Ought we not to be searching our hearts? And surely the answer is, no tears.

And has the Lord not said, he that goeth forth bearing precious seed with tears shall doubtless come again with rejoicing? Now, why tears? I've asked this question. Why are tears so necessary? Why is this a vital part of serving the Lord? After all, this is totally foreign to the modern contemporary church. They turn everything into gaiety and fluffiness.

And I fear that something of that spirit has come upon us. That we are quite content with orderly meetings, preaching for forty-five minutes, good truth, but no souls being saved. The reality is that the same light spirit can creep into any church.

And we think we're faithful, we think we're doing well, but we have forgotten that vital element of sowing with tears. I have three things to that question. Why tears? Firstly, God is looking for the contrite heart.

In the Psalm 51, we're told that the contrite heart God will not despise. Now, contrition means brokenness. Contrition is the opposite to pride.

It's the opposite to self-conceitedness. It's the opposite to being comfortable. And when we have comfortable prayer meetings, we're not contrite.

We're not broken. And the Lord expects, and the Lord looks for the contrite prayer warrior. He looks upon the heart.

Secondly, God promises to hear the cry of the righteous. Psalm 34. You can read that over and over.

The Lord heareth the cry of the righteous. Now, you could translate the word cry as an utterance of a plea. You could translate a cry as a loud shout for help.

But I think also there is the element in it of desperation. And we need in our praying, and we need in our evangelism, we need that spirit of helpless desperation. We're told in Psalm 56 that thou tellest my wanderings, put thou my tears into thy bottle.

Are they not in thy book? And there you have the idea of the Lord storing up our tears. And every tear we shed over a lost soul is a prayer in liquid form. And God hears the cry.

Then thirdly, God works through the wisdom of the cross. The cross is the wisdom of God. It is the power of God.

And cross broken Christians pray through the wisdom and power of the cross. And if you are a cross broken Christian, you don't pray, Lord, I can do it, He can do it. You come to the point where you say, Lord, only Thou canst do it.

And when that cross has broken your heart, you're ready to pray for His power to break sinners' hearts. Oh, to take up His cross. I don't know how to preach this tonight.

There is an element in Christianity that wants to have the cross in the rearview mirror of our Christian experience rather than in our daily power and walk with God. There is an aspect of people who want the cross, they want to hang it on a wall somewhere rather than live in the power of a self-denial, a life of self-denial, a life of putting down self, putting down the me in self, and casting our all upon the mercy and the grace of the Lord. I want to close with these four questions.

They're very short. They are really just a challenge. What if souls were to die today, would we weep then? Would we weep over their lost condition if we knew they were just dying? Is it not logical that we should start weeping now, before all hope is gone? Next, what if we knew that we had only the rest of this year of 2005 to serve the Lord and be a witness to a lost soul? Someone that you really care about, and you've only got the rest of this year to pray for that person and to witness to that person.

How would you go about it? How would it change your prayer ministry? What if we were transplanted in this church to the first century with the early Christians in their style of Christianity? How would we compare? My last question is what if the Apostle Paul was sitting in in one of our prayer meetings? I'm not going to answer that. I want you to answer it. The man of God wept.

You could write a book about Elisha, but that statement says it all. That's his epitaph. The man of God wept.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10292.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ian-goligher/weeping-for-souls/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net