

The Sweetness of Sweat - Acts 19:10-12

by Jon Courson

Practically loving others through acts of service and kindness can alleviate misery and bring healing, and understanding Jesus' love and sacrifice is key to experiencing faith and deliverance.

Scripture: Genesis 3:17, 2 Kings 13:21, Luke 8:43, Luke 22:44

Topics: "Divine Mystery", "Faith Ministry"

Description

Jon Courson delves into the story of the people of Ephesus collecting Paul's sweatbands and aprons, drawing parallels to modern-day obsessions with celebrity memorabilia. He emphasizes that the Ephesians were not spiritual groupies or quacks, but rather there are three key lessons to be learned from this passage: the Element of Mystery in God's ways, the Illustration of Ministry through physical expressions of faith like laying on of hands, and the Alleviation of Misery by practically loving and serving others as Paul did.

Transcript

Did you hear the news? A cosmetic company has collected the sweat of various movie stars, analyzed it, and reproduced the contents so it can be marketed throughout the country as 'Scent From The Stars'. Personally, I think the idea 'stinks' -- yet in our text, we see the people of Ephesus seemingly likewise interested in Paul's sweat as they collected his sweatbands and aprons. Were these people 'spiritual groupies' -- precursors of the modern-day 'roadies' who follow rock stars around?

Six months ago, the sweatbands of Jimi Hendrix sold for \$7,000.00. Greg Eckler, one of our drummers, was at the Monterey Pop Festival when Hendrix smashed his guitar over a loud speaker, lit it on fire, and threw it into the audience. Greg, who happened to catch a piece of the guitar as it flew over his head, recently sold it for thousands of dollars at an auction in New York City.

Is that the type of thing that was happening here in Acts 19? No, the Ephesians were not spiritual groupies -- nor were they spiritual quacks. You might hear TV evangelists or radio preachers, who on the basis of this passage, say, 'Send us an offering today and we'll send you a prayer cloth.' While I believe some of these men are sincere, most are spiritual quacks who, on the Day of Judgment, will find themselves dead ducks.

If the Ephesians were not spiritual groupies, nor spiritual quacks, then what was happening? I believe there are three lessons to be learned from this brief passage which can have eternal impact upon you and

me.

The Element of Mystery

There are many passages in the Bible I can't fully figure out -- like the one in 2 Kings 13 . . . Following the death of Elisha, some Moabites were marauding the country of Israel when one of them died suddenly. Wanting to dispose of the body of their comrade as quickly as possible, the Moabites threw his body into Elisha's tomb. But when the corpse touched Elisha's remains, the Moabite sprang back to life (2 Kings 13:21). Incredible! Amazing!

The Lord is too big to be boxed in by the theology or intellectual capacity of finite man. Thus, there is an underlying element of mystery about Him and about His dealings which we cannot begin to grasp or comprehend until we see Him face to face.

The Illustration of Ministry

Although there is an element of mystery inherent in this passage, there is also an illustration of ministry which is important for us personally. You see, oftentimes, we know the Lord can work, but we have trouble believing He will. That is why we find our faith wavering. We don't question His ability, but we do wonder about His willingness to work in the situations which confront us personally. Consequently, God has given us certain physical expressions to help trigger our faltering faith.

This is what I believe the laying on of hands, for example, is all about. When we lay hands on people to pray for them to be filled with the Spirit, or to ordain them for ministry, there's nothing magical, mystical, or miraculous about the act in and of itself. Rather, the laying on of hands simply provides a point of contact for the person who needs to be filled, or who desires to be used, as it triggers his faith and unlocks his ability to believe.

That's what happened with the woman who was hemorrhaging. For twelve years to no avail, she sought a doctor who could help -- but only lost all of her money in the process. When she heard Jesus was coming to town, she said to herself, 'If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I would be healed.' So when Jesus came through the city, although a great crowd of people lined the street, this woman fought her way through the crowd and touched Him. Jesus stopped instantly.

Now, although there was nothing magical about the hem of His garment, it provided a point of contact for the woman. And as the faith bottled up within her was released, she received healing that very day (Luke 8:43-48).

The anointing of oil, spoken of in James 5, is another example of something material being used spiritually. As with the laying on of hands, there is nothing supernatural or particularly special about oil. But as a picture of the Spirit, it is a physical illustration the Lord has graciously given to us as a point of contact to release faith.

There are those who are so skeptical, so uptight, and so rigid that they say, 'No one's going to lay hands on me. No one's going to put oil on my forehead. No one's going to dunk me in water.' But others, who understand that faith can be triggered and released through physical points of contact, are blessed and healed as a result of these external expressions.

The Alleviation of Misery

All around us we see people who are miserable -- depressed, discouraged and defeated; hurting, helpless, and hopeless -- like the people in Ephesus who were diseased in body and demonized in spirit.

I believe the reason sweatbands and aprons are particularly mentioned by the Spirit and recorded for us to study, is that they were proofs of Paul's love for the people to whom he ministered. You see, six days a week, Paul sewed tents from 7-11 a.m., taught the Word from 11-4 p.m., and sewed tents again from 4-9 p.m. It was an exhausting schedule, yet Paul did this for over two years in Ephesus in order to support himself in ministry. Thus, his aprons and sweatbands were saturated not only with the sweat of his brow, but with his love for the people.

So too, the people in your home, in this church family, and in our community who are distressed, discouraged, and defeated are greatly helped and their misery alleviated to a tremendous degree whenever we are willing to love them practically. For Paul, that meant sewing tents and teaching in the afternoon. For you, it might mean making a pie, making a phone call, or mowing a lawn; taking someone out to lunch, fixing a washing machine, or chopping a cord of wood.

In the past week, what have you done to help someone else? What have you done to practically say, 'You're loved' to someone who's discouraged, defeated, or depressed? Do you know people who are miserable and lost because there are no sweatbands for them to see -- no aprons for them to touch?

Miracles will happen, misery will be alleviated if you will practically love someone through the sweat of your brow. You can be used just as Paul was if you're willing to take your eyes off yourself and your problems, your struggles, and your needs, and instead say, 'Who can I love today?' 'How can I love someone else?' you ask. 'No one has ever loved me.'

Really? Go to the Garden of Gethsemane and there you will see One Who loved you so intensely that Luke tells us He actually sweat blood (Luke 22:44). Why did He sweat blood? Because He was about to absorb your weaknesses, your failings, your shortcomings. He was about to pay the price for every sin I have done, am doing, or ever will do.

It is, therefore, nothing less than audacity, nothing short of insanity, for us to say, 'Nobody cares about me.' Go to the Garden and see His sweat of blood. Go to Calvary and see His sweatband of thorns.

In Genesis 3, because Adam sinned, God said, 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee,' (Genesis 3:17-18).

In the Person of Jesus Christ, this prophecy is seen in an entirely different dimension. You see, as the thorns and thistles -- the very curse of the earth -- were embedded in His brow for me, He carried upon Himself the curse of Genesis 3.

Thus, because of the sweat and the thorns upon His brow, the way is opened for me to live eternally in the new heaven and the new earth, where there will be no more sweat, no more pain, no more thorns. Know this today, precious people: There is One Who sweat blood for you.

Once you truly see how much He loves you, you'll find yourself reaching out to touch the crown of thorns which circled His head. And once you touch it, once you grasp it, once you understand it, His love will trigger in you such faith that demons of depression and discouragement, defeat and despair will flee.

Like the Ephesians, you will be healed. And then you will say, 'Who can I love practically? What can I do to encourage someone else so that my apron, or my sweatband might become a point of contact for his or her faith to be released?'

Saints, I pray that, because you've been touched by the blood-stained sweat of Jesus, you'll find you have no other choice than to touch someone else for His sake. Amen.

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