



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dearest family,

It is impossible to read the book of Acts without being impacted by what I will call apostolic actions. From the outset, Acts 2:43 tells us that "wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" many of which are recorded in the next 26 chapters. After all, the text is called 'The **Acts** of the Apostles.' These apostolic actions attest to the power of God, to their dependence on the Holy Spirit, to their faith. However, on Sunday I drew your attention, not to the obvious actions but to what begins in a hidden place, the heart, before it is expressed in public, not as actions, but as affections. Our subject was 'apostolic affections'.

It is not possible to be saved, to be filled with the Spirit and have blah affections. That doesn't mean we are loud or suddenly become extroverts but it does mean that we are related to how God feels, as well as acts. We are affected by what affects the perceptions and receptions of God's love. We are not emotionally disconnected from what moves the heart of God. Not surprisingly, the apostles were men of passion and affection. The narrative is a historical record of what happened, what was seen by "eyewitnesses". Volume 1 of Luke's history, his gospel, was explicit about this. He was writing an account of "those who from the first were the eyewitnesses." (1:2) So the emphasis is on the exterior acts.

Although there is no self-revelation of the characters about what is going on in their emotions, in the form of soliloquy, or by way of self-confession, or by way of a story-teller's description of their emotional expressions, or by way of recorded conversation, once in a while, evidence of their affections surface through tiny cracks, but Luke does not draw any particular attention to them or comment on them: the affections behind the pleading and warning of the preaching, the gladness and encouragement of the fellowship, the sincere love and worship of the community. There are evidences of affections that were not so comfortable or comforting of self and others: "troubled" (16:18), "sharp dispute and debate" (15:2), "sharp disagreement" (15:39), "shook out his clothes in protest" (18:6), "greatly distressed to see the city full of idols" (17:16). We know they were tempted to the emotions of real fear or why would they be told not to be afraid (18:9).

It is when we get to read the epistles that we feel the currents of affection in these apostles' hearts. Re-read the epistles of Peter and John and feel those affectionate appeals yourself. But the main person of attention in Acts, apart from Jesus, is unquestionably Paul. He gets a bad rap from so many, who regard him as if he is some hard-hearted doctrinaire character. He is accused of being tough and rough confrontationally, of being a misogynist, of being unpastoral or unsympathetic. He seems to have no problem going head to head with folk. Some see him not as compassionate but dispassionate – all of which of course is a nasty demonic PR attempt to discredit and subvert his teaching and his gospel. This could not be more wrong.

When you read his epistles, it is the Paul of Acts, in some cases expressing his affections to the people he was teaching and reaching in the missionary journeys that Luke records in the narrative: the Galatians (16:6), the Philippians (16:12), the Thessalonians (17:1), the Corinthians

(18:1), the Ephesians (19:1), the Romans (28:11). Whenever Paul talks about the affections of Jesus that are characteristic of life in the Spirit, he is talking about the affections of his own heart. He knows those affections of "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience" that he exhorts the Colossians to have (3:12); "the sincere love" that he asks of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:6) Sometimes his appeal to another's affections is to simply give his own as an example, as to Timothy: "You know about my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance." (2 Tim. 3:10) There is no way in this letter I can repeat the range of references that I gave you so I suggest you listen to the download of the message. We looked at the range of his expressed affections including: joy, gentleness, fatherly and brotherly love, longing. But as strong and encouraging as these affections are, Paul could not spare himself the pains that come from deep affection, and the damage that affections have to endure. This is why he describes himself and his affections as being of "patient endurance" (2 Cor. 1:6) We noted the words he used to describe his affections: fear, jealousy, conflict, trembling, grief, affliction, anguish, sorrow, tears. It is that mention of tears that captures the heart of Paul's apostolic affections.

"I served the Lord with great humility and **tears**... remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with **tears**" (Acts 20: 19, 31) This chapter marks the end of the missionary journeys and the beginning of the final season of Paul's life, with his arrests that lead to his eventual house imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome. In a way, this is Paul's epitaph, his most concentrated self-description. There are hundreds of books written about Paul's preaching and teaching, his praying and his missionary journeys, but as important as all of these aspects of his life are, what about these tears? May his weeping not have been the reason for his reaping? Did not Ps. 126:5 say, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy"? Paul's private tears are as essential an explanation for much of the Acts narrative as Paul's public miracles, and they have something important to teach us as their flow connects us with the stream of God's heart for the church and the world.

Paul is indeed walking in the footsteps of Jesus, who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus offered his prayers and petitions "with loud cries and tears." (5:7) The gospels reveal the times that His own affections could not be contained. He shed tears when he encountered: a refusal to accept his revelation (Bethany); a refusal to accept his requirements (Rich young ruler); a refusal to accept his relationship (Jerusalem). Basically, we love and are inspired by the effectiveness of the acts of the apostles and covet them for our own context, but we are less desirous of their affections. But he wrote to the Corinthians "with many tears"; he warned the Ephesians day and night "with tears"; he reminded the Philippians "with tears" that "many live as enemies of the cross of Christ." Is this just Paul being emotional? No, this is Paul being like Jesus. Here is a theology of tears based on conclusions drawn from just about every reference to tears in scripture:

1. **Tears are an appropriate response for the people of God:** to backsliding, to sin, to unfaithfulness, to spiritual adultery. "My eyes fail from weeping because my people are being destroyed... the people will go in tears to seek the Lord... "(Lam. 2:11; Jer.50:4)
2. **God responds to tears of repentance and brokenness:** "I have heard your prayers and seen your tears. I will heal you... the Lord has heard my weeping... (2 Kg. 20:5; Ps. 6:8)
3. **Tears are God's call and desire sometimes:** "Return with fasting and weeping... the Lord called you to weep... You strum away like David but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph... Grieve, mourn, wail... (Joel 2:12; Is22:12; Amos 6:5; Jm. 4:9)
4. **Tears are the experience and expression of the Godhead:**
 - a. God: "I drench you with my tears... My heart laments, my inmost being... Is there any sorrow like my sorrow? (Isa. 16:9; Isa. 16:11-12; Lam. 1:12)

b. Jesus: "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... prayed with loud cries and tears... (Isa. 53:3; Hebr. 5:7)

c. Spirit: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit... (Eph. 4:30)

In summary, in scripture tears express: the grief that God feels, the grief that God requires, the grief that God responds to, the grief that God's people experience and express as they respond to God's heart.

David asked God, "Put my tears in your bottle." (Ps. 56:8) We too have a choice in personal and national circumstances: are we going to chuck our hope in the trash can, or are we going to put our tears in a bottle? Someone commented: "It is amazing there are so few tears when there is so much to weep about." Maybe we need to ask why there is so little apostolic affection? We don't have any? We have it but are afraid to show it? We have it but don't know how to show it? We're too governed by secular social codes and their protocols of social politeness, dignity and decorum? A wrong and deficient view of God? A lack of understanding of what we received at salvation, including a new heart and the affections of God. Does our temperament control God's affections in us and through us? Is there a deficiency in our desire?

We want to see the actions of God but we also need to express the affections of God. Would it ever be said of us that we "served with humility and tears"?

Pastorally yours,
Stuart