

## Medicine of the Person 2009 in Unteröwisheim, Germany

### Bible-Study on the Theme of “Non-Verbal Communication”

As a form of non-verbal communication I have chosen **weeping** as the theme for my Bible-study. Weeping as the expression of strong emotions can lend greater emphasis to our words or occasionally replace them, if certain situations leave us speechless.

In the first part, I intend to cite various instances of weeping with reference to accounts from the Bible, which may be understood as God's unchangeable Word. The reasons for weeping are often not at all easy to separate, because several frequently interlock with each other.

In the second part, I shall relate these to our everyday life.

In the third part, I intend to express some concluding thoughts on the theme.

#### **1.) Reasons for weeping in the Bible:**

In the Bible, we find many accounts concerning people weeping. The reasons for this are diverse:

- 1.) Sadness at a loss, for example, through the death or parting of a loved one, or indeed through loss of one's health, among other things.
- 2.) Realisation and repentance at one's own failure and guilt, and, in such a case, the unpleasant consequences thereof.
- 3.) Tears of joy and tears of gratitude, which may mingle with tears through suffering of various kinds.
- 4.) Misunderstanding and inadequate perception. On the one hand, one may weep over people, who refuse to be held back from running into their own misfortune; on the other hand, over suffering, which has a deeper sense, and only represents an intermediate step towards a higher goal.

**Expansion of 1.)** As an example of sadness over a loss, we find the account in the Second Book of Kings in Chapter 20 about Hezekiah, who wept on hearing the news of his very imminent death. His tearful prayer achieves the result that he is granted another 15 years of lifespan. His tears are the expression of his sadness and demonstrate the earnestness of his prayer.

In the Book of Job (Ch. 2), we are told about the friends of Job, who, on seeing Job's suffering, fell into a horror-stricken silence for 7 days and could only weep.

**Expansion of 2.)** We find an example of tears of repentance over failure in Matthew 26:69-75: Peter wept bitterly, after he came to the realisation that, despite knowing better and being warned by Jesus – who knew him better than Peter did himself – had betrayed his Lord. Bach depicts this scene very intensely in his *St Matthew Passion*. I am very much moved on every occasion by this depiction of the Evangelist's, presumably for the very fact that this event reminds me of my own situations of failure. The music in addition makes the weeping even clearer – non-verbally.

Or we recall to our minds the tears of Saul (1 Samuel 24:17), when he learns that David, whom he was pursuing, had spent the night in the same cave as himself and had not killed him, although David would easily have had the chance. As a piece of evidence for this opportunity, David had merely cut off a piece from Saul's robe and presented it to him, as a token of respect towards his king. Saul's tears of shame about his mistaken estimation of David and repentance over his persecution-mania mingled with his tears of gratitude.

David himself had time and again tearfully pleaded before our Lord not to punish him for his sins.

He was conscious of his own guilt and his capacity for guilt.

A tearful prayer demonstrates being deeply affected in the heart. I perceive such a prayer as particularly genuine and significant: “*With all my soul*”, which can scarcely be expressed in words alone.

**Expansion of 3.)** The interlocking of repentance and gratitude is likewise conveyed to us in Luke's account (Ch. 7, verse 38) about the “great sinner”. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, she had been able to draw near to Jesus as he reclined at table with the others, and washed his feet with her tears, then dried them with her hair, and subsequently anointed them. Jesus pointed out in his parable of the two debtors, which he told to those present yet failing to understand in order to explain the situation, that he who is pardoned of a greater debt is all the more grateful. Simon considered that as the host he had no need to wash Jesus' feet, although that was then customary. But this woman demonstrated her repentance over her past life and her great gratitude with this gesture, because she believed in Jesus as the Messiah (Isaiah 53).

**Expansion of 4.)** In the New Testament, it is reported at least twice that Jesus wept, and actually on each occasion because of the people's lack of understanding. Luke writes in his Gospel (Ch. 19, v. 41) that Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of the impending punishment, because the people had not taken advantage of the “grace period”; that is to say, they had rejected Jesus along with his message and his mission for their salvation because of their “hard-heartedness”. People's weeping because of repentance over failure and not paying heed to God's instructions and the subsequent punishment has, as we can already read repeatedly in the Old Testament, only briefly led people to acknowledgement of their wrongdoing. Even then, they turned away from God time and again, preferring their own ways. They refused to understand that only through God's guidance and total return to Him would they find true life and peace. Jesus saw deeper and wept over this lack of understanding, as he beheld Jerusalem.

Likewise in the account about the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-54), we learn that Jesus wept ultimately over the people's lack of understanding. The actual reason for his reluctance to depart directly for Bethany after learning about Lazarus' illness, was that he wanted to make clear to the people through the raising of the already deceased Lazarus, that as the awaited Messiah he indeed has power over death, and that is to say not only over physical death, but equally over the eternal. He wanted to give the people a new hope that reaches beyond the earthly. But they did not understand him and were constantly engaged in purely human, superficial arguments. Thus likewise they explained his weeping in a humanly intelligible way, namely that Jesus loved Lazarus. In that case, however, he should have come immediately, in order to spare Lazarus his dying and those surviving their mourning. But Jesus had much more in mind, which was not understood. It was *this* that made him sad: the fact that they lived only within their own little world, despite his having been announced – most recently by John the Baptist – and the circumstances of his birth, his deeds and sayings pointing to him.

Time and again, we read in the Bible about situations filled with lamentation, in which, at first superficially, the purely human emotion of sadness plays a part, because people have no perception; for example, people weep at the foot of Jesus' cross (John 16:20), or Mary weeps at Jesus' tomb (John 20:11). For indeed it is contrary to every human sentiment to rejoice in such a situation, if someone or a group have to suffer. That this suffering likewise had to happen on my account was not understood at that point in time. Jesus rejected such human tears through the argument (see for example Luke 23, v. 28) that it would be better to weep over one's own imminent ill fate than over him, who, though he must first suffer and die, would then rise again. Time and again, Jesus' concern is with perception, that is to say, eternal destiny. Ultimately, the earthly life is counted as little on the very limited human plane. Likewise in the Acts of the Apostles, Ch. 21, the story is told about

the Ephesians that they wept at Paul's departure and thus wanted to hold him back from his journey, because great sufferings were in store for him and they would not see him again. But he did not allow himself to be influenced by this, because he was certain that he should obey and serve God in this way.

People's weeping in situations full of suffering, as for example at the death of Jairus' young daughter, who was then called again to life (Luke 8:52), or the youth of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), or indeed even over the death of Lazarus (see above), expressed on the one hand people's helplessness in the face of death and was in a certain way a prerequisite for their actual understanding of what Jesus' power over death means for them.

## **II.) Weeping in our everyday life**

What is the nature of weeping in our consultation hour or in any other kind of encounter?

Presumably the most frequent cause of sadness during consultation is the one concerning the diagnosis of a serious illness and its intervening therapy, as the translator into English is presently going through. Likewise the thwarting of life-plans through permanent handicaps, following an accident or even terror attacks, is a cause for many tears until such a situation can be coped with. Personally, I have mostly felt and still consider it as a gift if someone can weep in my presence and thereby give voice to something very personal in confidentiality. It may be weeping over precisely that loss of health or life opportunities, or indeed about the loss of loved ones, or over an injustice sustained, which – mourned for together with others – can bring relief. This applies especially if the company is seen as a Godsend.

Similarly, lack of understanding can make us weep if confrontations about essential things seem to open up an abyss between two people. If no bridge is found over this abyss, we fall silent and cannot do anything else but weep. Sometimes we find it helpful if someone weeps together with us.

Someone may also be overwhelmed by tears if failure and guilt are given voice. Some people think in this case that they must apologize, because it is embarrassing or too intimate for them, or because they do not want to burden their partner in conversation. In such situations I have gladly handed them a tissue, to express the fact that here is an opportunity to weep. Tears are often held back, because no-one has the time or willingness to bear burdens together or to think mutually about potential means of relief. This naturally demands a secure space and time, which, precisely then, one does not have available in sufficient measure. But because tears betray a sense of urgency, other people or things must wait, in order to find at least a possibility of further help in solving the problem.

A confession of guilt often renders us helpless and is therefore gladly avoided by both the guilty person and his partner in conversation. Guilt that one does not want to admit and therefore suppresses can lead to many sorrowful reactions, which are either met by weeping, or otherwise are unconsciously expressed through psychosomatic illnesses. David bears witness to this scenario in his own vivid language in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm (vv. 3-4): “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” Then he continues and lends courage to others burdened by guilt: “I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid; ... and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” This compassion of God's David could already experience, although it would first be linked with Jesus through his death on the cross and God's simultaneously valid justice, being sealed with the resurrection of Jesus. It is a mystery of God's, not to be grasped by the intellect, that may remove our fear of punishment and death. “O death, where is thy sting? ...” (1 Cor. 15, vv. 55-56). This does not exist in any other religion. However, a condition for this is that I acknowledge my guilt and believe that Jesus takes it upon himself for me. Only this belief is often lacking. It is not accepted. This was actually the reason for Jesus' tears over Jerusalem.

### **III.) Concluding Thoughts**

Already in Isaiah (Ch. 65, v. 19), but mainly in the Revelation of St. John (Ch. 21), it is prophesied by God that He will one day create a new heaven and a new earth, in which only rejoicing and no more weeping will be heard. However this only applies for those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer and Conqueror of everlasting death, through his death of atonement on the cross for our sins, and who live their lives in accordance with him – under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Set against this background, some things could change in their relationship to one another; some things would no longer provoke weeping in us, while others perhaps much more strongly. What is close to our hearts? People? Property? Our honour? In brief: the world?

This question has made me stop and reflect again more deeply while preparing this Bible-study.

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