

May 24, 2015

BLESSED ARE THE MOURNFUL

Matthew 5:1-12

Last Sunday, I began this series of sermons on the Beatitudes with the first and foundation of them all: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*. It is theirs because in feeling their desperate need for the Kingdom, they get it. That's the way God seems to work. God meets our real needs. Such are the poor in spirit. They have given up any trust they ever had in their own abilities to save themselves. In fact, the poor in spirit have given up relying on things (worldly things) and even on themselves. All that is left for them in their spiritual poverty is their need to rely on God. And until we can yield to God; unless we, in our poverty of spirit, do not become beggars of the Spirit of God, the Kingdom, cannot be ours.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

The second Beatitude says: ***Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*** This becomes the first offspring of spiritual poverty. Having seen our own desperation, turning to God, and then looking again at the world around us, the misery of our and everyone else's desperation intensifies our grief.

But there is a blessedness to our mourning. There is implied, here, a joy of sorrow, a gladness of grief, a bliss for the broken hearted. It might not seem like a good thing to be full of sorrow, and Jesus never claimed that grief was a blessing, but, in Psalm 51:17 we are reminded that *"the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."*

To a world that says, *"Eat drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,"* Christ says, *"Grieve, for today, and tomorrow, many will still suffer."* We should not be content with an unexamined life. The real beginning of spiritual Christianity is an utter dissatisfaction with life as it is, evoking a sorrow that pierces the heart with the intensity of mourning, plunging us into a feeling that hurts so much we don't want to endure it. We don't want anyone to feel this way. Comfort must come or we will all die!

But since this mournfulness is over the shocking realization of our own sin and of the sinfulness of this Fallen world, the answer is at hand: Repent! Penitence! Unless we repent, the grief becomes an overwhelming burden. We are not only broken, we are crushed. And only God can put the pieces of our lives back together. With God, the darkness of our world can reveal the starlight of the heavens. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:10, *"Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death."* The sorrow of repentance and penitence is the doorway to the joy of forgiveness.

I mentioned the sense of dissatisfaction with life as it is. Today, too many people are satisfied. And if they're not, they're either dissatisfied and indifferent, disaffected, detached; or, they just don't know what they need to do; and, maybe, they're detached just enough not to be looking for a better way. But our sadness should make us better, not bitter; if... it is godly grief, faithful dissatisfaction!

One of the first responses to grief is denial. And then begins a ritual of blaming. We should learn, however, that when something has gone wrong, we shouldn't look for someone or something to blame, but for the solution to the problem. Turn your problems into projects! Sometimes, though, we'll even want to blame God! Job didn't blame God. His reaction was, *"The Lord gives, and the Lord has*

taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 1:21) Job stood fast in his integrity, and in the integrity of God.

In our grief, there is also anger, a feeling of wanting to fight back. Rather than merely accepting defeat, we want to rebel against the pain. Out of such a feeling can come a new resolve, a renewed hope. Sorrow motivates us to rethink our attitudes. Through mourning we can begin to discover what really matters, as well as what doesn't matter at all. A little girl lost her doll and was sad. Her father bought her a new doll to try to cheer her up. It didn't work. The father came to talk to the girl. He said he wanted to make her feel better. The little girl said, "Just hug me." Through sorrow, we can rediscover the meaning of friendship, the meaning of love. *Things* don't really seem to matter. And when our values begin to change, your whole life can start to change too!

For everything there is a season...a time to weep, and a time to laugh. Sorrow has its place. One of the unique blessings that can come through grief is that we can discover whether our faith is a real foundation, or, a superficial ornament. And still, sometimes, when you hit bottom, you can find that God is there too.

Contrast the blessedness of those who mourn with the depression of those who never express their sorrow or grief, who hold in all their brokenness. If we accept the present toil and the present tears, we will be able to know the ultimate and permanent joy. We must be sensitive, though, because sometimes sadness builds unintended barriers. My sadness might make you hold back. We've been conditioned to assume that the only normal state of being is cheerfulness. We don't always know what to do when another adult cries, and even though we sympathize, we hold it in and try to lie and say, "it's all right."

But it's not all right! We're not fine! If we choose to live as if nothing really mattered beyond this moment, then all we will get is what this moment has to offer. But if we choose to live with the conviction that there is something far more important beyond us now, the whole world will seem more meaningful. We will grieve when that truth is denied.

Blessed are those who mourn. Mourners do not just weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), they have a deep concern. Mourners will weep even for those who do not weep over their neighbor's sins, and over the wickedness of the whole world. The mournful that are blessed, are grieving with God! They are troubled over those who still walk on in darkness. They are hurt by all the dishonor being done continually to the majesty of the Kingdom of Heaven!

Cool detachment becomes the sin. But one who mourns is grieved enough to give up their own comfort to try to comfort another. Such a person was Mother Teresa. Such a person is promised final comfort. Such a person is blessed.

THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

People who weep with those who weep will bring to others a comfort, not a comparison of their own grieving. They will bring compassion, not euphemisms. They will bring companionship, not camaraderie. They will bring calm, not tension. There is a presence, not a pity. And we must all be willing to accept the blessings of comfort that God is offering to us through the caring arms of others.

Like a parent never leaving a young child alone at the hospital, God is always by our side to comfort us. Comfort gives us courage. God enables us to face the future. We must let our visions be shaped by hope, not by hurt. We shouldn't dwell on what devastates us, on what we've lost, or on what

we may now lack. We should think, rather, about what is left: Life! And life is a garden. Judge it by the flowers, not by the leaves that fall!

Godly comfort can be seen in the open arms of the prodigal father, glad to see his penitent son return. It is consoling, like a divine hug, and underneath are the everlasting arms! Godly comfort is the difference between being devastated and isolated, to being cared for in community. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:35-39) Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!*