August 16, 2015

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”

Matthew 5:4

**FCF**: Our struggle with repentance

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be.

(magnet) We should then heed and pursue it.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

“Love Story” – a 1970 film with Ali MacGraw and Ryan O’Neal. The plot? Boy meets girl. Boy and girl fall in love. Girl gets ill and dies. The famous tagline? “*Love means never having to say you’re sorry*.” According to the American Film Institute, “Love Story” is one of the Top Ten Most Romantic Movies. I’ll say this. If you want to torture me, just strap me down and play it. Because it’s not love that means never having to say you’re sorry. It’s pride. Pride dictates and demands that we will not admit we’re wrong either to ourselves or anyone else.

Let me put it this way. We struggle with confession and repentance. Seeing what we’ve done, owning it, acknowledging it to those we’ve hurt, making amends – it doesn’t come easy to us. And not being able to do it cripples relationships – both with each other and with God.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:1-12

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

An oxymoron is not a dumb farm animal. No, it’s defined as (READ quote) “*a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction*”. Some examples – new antique, jumbo shrimp, reality TV, acting naturally. Some lines to illustrate this (READ quotes):

*“I can resist anything except temptation.” – Oscar Wilde*

*“I like humanity, but I loathe persons.” – Edna St. Vincent Millay*

*“No one goes to that restaurant anymore. It’s always too crowded.” – Yogi Berra*

Jesus’ words here in our text can sound like an oxymoron as well – “*Happy are the unhappy*.”

The confusion comes with misunderstanding the terms. As we saw last week, “happy” doesn’t do justice to the word. “Blessed” is an objective assessment of someone. It is not a commentary on their emotional state or how they feel. It means their life is how life should be. So they should then be admired, envied, emulated, imitated. That’s what “blessed” means.

With each of these beatitudes, Jesus is making clear the way our lives should be. And so, with each of these beatitudes, we should then be heeding and pursuing what He is describing (READ Matthew 5:4). What would it mean for us to heed and pursue this? That’s a reasonable question. And, to get at the answer, we need to deal with three other questions. First, who is Jesus describing? Second, why are they blessed? And, third, how can this be true for us?

1. **WHO ARE THEY?**

First, who is this? Who is Jesus describing as mourning here? In understanding this second beatitude, it’s important to recognize its connection to the first (READ Matthew 5:3-4).

1. *Common Reasons for Mourning*

There are common reasons for mourning, reasons we are accustomed to seeing.

1. Loss

Certainly, one would be loss. The loss of a loved one, the mourning of bereavement. Or perhaps the loss of a heart’s hope, the mourning of disappointment. Those are both common.

1. Caught

Another kind might be the mourning of getting caught. Think of the convicted criminal and his loss of freedom. Or the corrupt politician and her loss of power. Those too are common.

1. Gloomy

Perhaps I should add this – the pessimistic attitude. Those who gloomily walk about like Eeyore of the Hundred Acre Wood or Puddleglum of Narnia. For them, every cloud is sure to rain.

Those are common ordinary forms of mourning. We’re accustomed to them.

1. *Specific Reason for Mourning*

But they are not at all what Jesus is talking about here. Again, the first beatitude flows into the second. Jesus is speaking of a mourning for sin flowing out of a poverty of spirit.

1. Of the world

Mourning the sin of the world, seeing its corrosive effects, the inevitable results of spurning our Maker’s ways. A culture of injustice and oppression. So, like the prophets of old, we mourn.

1. Of others

Mourning the sin of the world and of others, those going their own way. And not just because they’ve hurt us but that we see how that is a symptom of deep issues within them. So we mourn.

1. Of ourselves

Mourning the sin of the world, of others, and of ourselves. We hear God’s commands, strive to heed them, and fail. All of which exposes the sin within us, our crooked twisted hearts. We see ourselves. And, with that, we see all the more why Christ had to die for us. So we mourn.

Who then are these Jesus says are blessed? Those who are mourning over sin.

*Illustration:*

We see this with Jesus Himself. For He is the only One who has lived this “beatitudinal” life. He shows us what it is to mourn for sin and its effects. Consider His lament for Jerusalem (READ Matthew 23:37). Jesus knew their hearts and what was coming. So He mourned.

*Application:*

Christianity, deeply embraced, is what can best make for genuine mirth and laughter. How? We’re freed from taking ourselves so seriously. And we have a joyful end in view.

That said, Christianity is not all laughs. It’s worth noting we have no recorded instance of Jesus laughing. That’s not to say He never did. But the emphasis is on Him as the Suffering Servant, the Man of Sorrows. The shortest and one of the most vital verses being “Jesus wept”.

The Fall is real. We ought not to make light of it. We need to be people who mourn. Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be. We should then heed and pursue it.

1. **WHY ARE THEY BLESSED?**

But why are mourners blessed? (READ Matthew 5:4) True mourning leads to comfort.

1. *From Whom*

Comfort, by definition, is reciprocal. Someone receives it only when another gives it.

1. From the Lord

From whom does this comfort then come? From the Lord. This comes out in the phrasing Jesus uses, a Jewish way of emphasizing it comes from the Lord Himself (READ 2 Corinthians 1:3).

1. Through the Holy Spirit

It is a comfort that comes from the God of comfort through the Holy Spirit (READ John 14:16). This word “Helper” can be translated as Counselor or Comforter. And He is described as “another” such, meaning that just as Jesus had been this to His disciples, so too would the Spirit. The comfort will come from none other than God Himself, specifically, through the Holy Spirit.

1. *With What*

But how? With what sort of comfort? With what sort of message?

1. Not as we’re accustomed

Not as we’re accustomed. Not with misguided comfort such as with Job’s friends who sat for a while but then unloaded on him with simplistic insight. Not with lying comfort such as with the false prophets, dressing the wounds of the people lightly, saying “Peace” when there was none.

1. But with what we need

Not as we’re accustomed but with what we need. Jesus, the consolation of Israel, says that those who mourn for sin can look forward to a future when all will be made new. Healing for all creation and all His people – no more crippling illness, no more sin enslavement. We can look forward to the future and lay hold in the present upon a full pardon for sin, our being completely forgiven of everything we’ve ever done. Looking forward and laying hold. Now.

Why are the mourners blessed? They have this comfort, the comfort of God Himself.

*Application:*

In the ancient world, the idea of a god who comforted was virtually unknown. It was expected of family and friends. But there was little talk of making appeals for such to the gods.

Little has changed. As a people, we are obsessed with the “pursuit of happiness”. We abandon our marriages for it. We shape our careers around it. We have industries devoted to it.

We’re settling for happiness when the Lord is offering us comfort (READ Matthew 5:4). Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be. We should then heed and pursue it.

1. **HOW CAN THIS BE TRUE OF US?**

Which brings us to the last question. How can this be true of us? What would it mean?

1. *Turn from the Lies*

It means we need to turn from the lies, lies which are all basically the same.

1. Liberal

The liberal lie is, “*You haven’t done anything wrong. So there’s nothing to worry about*.”

1. Conservative

The conservative lie is, “*Well, you have done something wrong. But it’s really not so bad. You can fix it. Just try a little harder. Play by the rules and do a bit better*.” They’re both lies. Neither have anything to mourn. There’s no deep brokenness or real sorrow for sin.

1. *Embrace the Truth*

For us to be blessed in this way, we need to turn from the lies and embrace the truth.

1. Much to mourn

The truth that we do, in fact, have much to mourn – within us and all around us.

1. The good news

But that there is good news. Jesus shows us what such mourning looks like and has mourned for us, in our place, as we should have. He is our example and our savior. And He has secured a hope we can lay hold of for a day coming of deep cosmic change (READ Revelation 21:1-5).

1. The results

And the results of embracing the truth are that we can then mourn. In fact, we’ll feel compelled to. We’ll mourn the sin we see within us and all around us. But not as those without hope.

How can we be blessed in this way? By turning from the lies and embracing the truth.

*Application:*

Years ago, I read C. S. Lewis’ essay, “The Sermon and the Lunch”. There he describes a pastor and the emptiness of his ministry created by the inconsistency of his message with his home. For years, I have said, “*I don’t want to be that guy*,” not so much a signpost but a stumbling block to the gospel in the lives of his children. For I know I can be. And, but by the grace of God, I will be. For I can be so fearful, impatient, even angry. And I’m mourning that.

Now some of you will be tempted to say to me, “*You’re not that bad*.” Yes, I am. And you’re not helping me by saying that. Understand that I am mourning my sin. But not as one without hope. As John Newton said late in his life (READ quote), “*Although my memory is nearly gone; I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior*.”

All that is to say this. Don’t play this down in my life. Or in yours. (READ Matthew 5:4) Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be. We should then heed and pursue it.

**CONCLUSION:**

We need more than the pursuit of happiness. We need the pursuit of blessedness – the kind Jesus is speaking of here. And the path to that does not go through the glitter and glitz of party town. It goes through the dark shrouds of the valley of mourning. The way up is down.

The greatest treasure is found in the deepest mines. Imagine you are visiting a village in the mountains. After some time there, you make two discoveries. First, there is a mine in the hills. The shaft is deep, dark, and perilous. But there are jewels – a few at the surface, more as you go down, incalculable riches at the bottom. That’s your first discovery – a mine in the hills.

Your second discovery is this – there are two types of people in the village. One group has never ventured into the mine. They’ve scratched the surface but have been unwilling to go to the depths, no matter the assurance of what they’ll find. So they are poor, barely scraping by.

The other group of people is a stark contrast, astonishingly rich with much they gladly give away, for they really have discovered the secret of the mine. If indeed you go to the bottom, you find, with the riches, that you are utterly exhausted with no strength for the climb back – just as the poor group warned. But here’s the thing. The Treasure Keeper – a mysterious figure who made the hills and years before built the village and lives in the mountain – meets you at the bottom, carries you up, and grants you more riches than you could ever have hoped.

The greatest treasure is found in the deepest mines. But we have to be willing to go there, down the shaft. Are we? Or will we settle for scratching at the surface? (READ Matthew 5:4) Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be. We should then heed and pursue it.

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