

## **“Where Real Life Begins: When I Mourn My Sin”**

Somewhere on my list of least favorite things (in life) is waking up in the middle of an awesome dream. Don't you hate when that happens? You just want to go back to sleep and let it continue, but it never works out that way. Once you wake up from the dream, the dream is over and there's no going back.

I love the way it all (seems to work) in some of those crazy dreams. I had one (not long ago) where I was hanging out at this lake and there were monkeys and I was getting ready for church. And then we had a staff meeting, and then I was in church. And (in the dream) it all made perfect sense and I was happy, even in the staff meeting. And then you wake up and it's all over, and there's no going back.

As I was getting ready for this message (today), it struck me that there are moments like that for all of us where we wake up from the dream and (become aware) that there's no going back. You're smacked upside the head by the things that (happen in life) and you never really go back to sleep.

For some people, they wake up from their dream when they get a phone call, and the person (on the other end) tells them there's been an accident and they need to come to the hospital. Some people wake up from the dream when they're called into the office and told that the position they've had for years has been eliminated, and the dream comes to an end. Some people (even at a young age) wake up from their dream when their parents introduce them to the word “divorce” and they never (really) go back to sleep.

Every dream that comes to an end is marked by a loss. The people (involved) lose something. We've all lost something. Loss is inevitable. You might lose your job, or your health, or a relationship, or your house. It's going to happen.

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.” (He told us it's going to happen.) Loss is part of life. You've either had it, you're in the middle of it, or it's coming your way. And so the question is, in the midst of loss, in those moments of life, how do we get through it?

I came across an interesting article about Ernest Hemingway. He was sitting down (having lunch) with some of his writer friends. They made him a bet that he couldn't write a short story using only six words. He took them up on the bet. He pulled out a napkin and scribbled this six-word story: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

Your six words may be different, but all of us (at some point) will be able to tell such a story; a story where the dream comes to an end. At that point, when it happens, Jesus makes this promise. In Matthew five, he says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Does that even make sense?) “Blessed are those who mourn?”

In this series, we're looking at some of the verses in what are called “the Beatitudes,” some of the upside-down teachings of Jesus that, at first, don't seem to make sense. Last week (for example), we said “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Blessed are the poor? That's counterintuitive to the way we think. We say “Blessed are the rich.” Blessed and rich, those things go together. Jesus comes along and says “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

It still doesn't work. We say, “Blessed are the self-reliant in spirit. Blessed are the self-sufficient. Blessed are those who can take care of themselves.”

Jesus says, “No. Here's how it works. Blessed are those who realize they can't help themselves and ask God for help. Blessed are those who recognize they are bankrupt, broke, destitute, because in that moment they make room for God.”

Blessed are you, Jesus says, when you finally come to a point where you say “I can't fix it. I can't mend it. I can't quit it. I can't put the pieces back together. God, I need help.” (Blessed are the poor in spirit.) That was last week.

But this one, (this one), it's not just counterintuitive. It's almost as if it's contradictory. “Blessed are those who mourn?” It's like saying “Happy are the sad” or “Happy are the unhappy.” How can Jesus say that?

There are a couple of different ways in which the word “mourning” is used in scripture. One way is to think about the kind of mourning we've been talking about; the kind that comes from the tragic experiences that

inevitably arise. It's the loss; the loss of health, the loss of relationship. We mourn the tragic experiences. Jesus says (when that happens), "Blessed are those who mourn."

Now, that might sound nice (for Jesus to say that); even a bit poetic. It might even sound like it could work when you're talking about things in general. But when you move from the general to the specific, it doesn't seem to fit.

If you say, "Blessed is the young widow who is raising four kids by herself...Blessed is the man who has lost his job and is about to lose his home...Blessed is the alcoholic in recovery whose wife has left him...Blessed is the wife whose husband walked out on her for another woman...Blessed is the child with a disability that makes them feel different from everyone else. "Blessed are those who mourn." What does that mean?

What Jesus does (in these verses) is he takes our assumptions of a blessed life and he flips it. How you and I often times define what it means to be blessed, Jesus says, "Actually, it's not that. It's this."

You see, we would think, "Blessed are those whose dreams come true. Blessed are those who end up with what they want. Blessed are those when everything in life goes their way." Jesus says, "No, blessed are those who mourn." It seems so upside-down.

I've been preaching for almost thirty years and (as crazy as it sounds), I've found that it's actually not. There is a blessing that comes in mourning, and I've experienced it in my own life and witnessed it in the lives of many others. There is a peace and a love that is experienced in a deeper and (more real way) through our tears. God's presence becomes known to us in a way (like never before) when we're going through things that hurt. That blessing comes to us when we mourn.

Loss is inevitable. (It doesn't matter who we are.) How we respond to loss is a different question. Many have a tendency (when that happens) to push God away. But when we draw near to God, God draws near to us and we are blessed.

Here's what I've seen happen. God comes into the space created by our loss and he fills it with himself. That is the blessing. God comes into the space created by our loss and he fills it with himself. Everyone experiences loss. Everyone mourns. But those who trust in Jesus (in the midst of their mourning) find out that it's not the end.

Now, I know this isn't easy, (for any of us) because (most of us), we do everything we can to avoid mourning. And we do it, because we've bought into this idea that the pursuit of happiness means that we should always have a smile on our face, and so we do everything we can to avoid it. We try everything: entertainment, prescription drugs, relationships, partying, working long hours; anything we can to avoid the pain. But there's a blessing from God that is found only in our tears.

It doesn't make sense, but it's real. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn." When you go through the tragic circumstances that (inevitably arise) and you wake up from the dream and (there's no turning back) and you finally (and fully) put your faith in God, there's a blessing that comes in that moment.

That's the first kind of mourning; the kind that comes from loss, when things (in life) don't go the way we had planned. There's another kind of mourning in the Bible that's just as real, and (I believe) it's also this kind of mourning that Jesus is talking about in this verse.

It's not only the kind of mourning that comes from the suffering and pain and loss that we experience. It's also the kind of mourning we experience when we feel a grief, a broken heart, over the sin in our lives and the sin around us. That's also the mourning Jesus is talking about.

If you study this in scripture (and it's interesting), there's a direct connection between mourning the sin in our lives (and the sin in the world around us) and God's blessing coming to us. There's a direct connection. When God's people mourn and grieve and weep over the sin in their lives and in their communities, it's an invitation for God's blessing to return to his people.

Remember the story of King David and his sin with Bathsheba? (It doesn't get any worse.) Adultery, he had her husband killed, and then he took her as his wife. In psalm fifty-one, he confesses his sin. (He realizes what he has done and he's in tears.)

(Verse one): "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all of my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

(Verse seven): "Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice."

(Verse twelve): “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

And now, look at what it says. (Verse sixteen): “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

David says, “Look, you want God’s blessing on your life, you want the joy of God to return; there needs to be a broken heart. There needs to be mourning over your sin.”

This isn’t how many of us come at it. We’re not very good at this. We apologize. We say “God, I’m sorry.” And we are sorry. We know we shouldn’t have done it, and so we say we’re sorry. Kind of like we (say we’re sorry) when we spill a glass of water (in a restaurant) and someone else has to clean it up. We say we’re sorry, and we are. We apologize. But this isn’t what we’re talking about.

Brokenness and confession and repentance are not apologizing. It’s mourning and it is weeping, and this is what invites God’s blessing into our lives.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” Blessed are those who weep over their sin, and not because you get caught or get busted or because you had no other choice. You weep because you know you have offended the holiness of God.

Blessed are you when you are brokenhearted over your sin. You’re not just sorry because you shouldn’t have talked to your spouse that way, or your parents that way. You’re not just sorry because you took another drink, or you shouldn’t have looked at that website, or you gossiped about that other person. You’re not just sorry about that, but you are broken because you know what your sin has done to God, and because of what it cost your Savior, Jesus Christ. The tears that come (as a result) invite the blessing of God.

People come in for counseling and want to make changes. Their marriage is having trouble. Their addictions are getting out of control and they know they need some help. That’s good. It’s a start. But it’s not enough. Have you wept over your sin? Have you’ve grieved over what’s happening as a result?

William Barclay, in his commentary on Matthew’s gospel, says this about the weight of this word “mourn”. He says “The word for “to mourn” used here is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language...It is defined as the kind of grief that takes such hold of a man that it cannot be hid. It is not only the sorrow (the mourning) that brings an ache to the heart; it is the sorrow (or mourning) that brings the unrestrainable tears to the eyes.” (Have you cried over your sin?)

In the 1600’s a preacher by the name of Thomas Watson preached on this text. He put it this way. He said, “Tears melt the heart of God.” “A broken and contrite heart God will not despise.” It’s what invites the blessing of God into your home, into your marriage, into your family, and into your life; when you finally stop just being sorry, and you weep over your sin.

Let’s be honest. This is hard for us. It’s not that we don’t want to; we just don’t know how to do it. It’s not what we’ve been taught.

What do we learn every day? What is the world telling us about sin? What’s the opposite of mourning? (It’s laughing.) That’s what our world is telling us. It’s telling to laugh at our sin.

You see it on television, in the movies, it’s all over Hollywood. It’s in our music. (Am I wrong?) We’re not being taught to mourn over our sin. We’re being taught to laugh at it.

No wonder we’re not very good at it. I don’t know if we’re ever going to be good at it, until we unplug ourselves from some of that stuff. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.”

James, chapter four, it speaks of God’s blessing. It tells us how. (It says), “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

Isn’t that an odd way to find happiness? Isn’t it unusual that we come to church and we learn about how to be happy, and we’re told to turn our laughter into mourning? That’s where you find happiness.

I’ll confess that for a long time in life, I never understood what this was all about. I could blow off (and rationalize) sin as easily as anyone else. But there’s no happiness in that. Until your sin brings tears to your eyes and grieving in your heart, you’ll never really know. But when it happens, that’s when it happens. And when it happens, that’s when you’ll know what it means to be happy.

And so, you tell me. Where is the man, (where is the man) who weeps over his selfishness and pride? Where is the woman who weeps over her gossip and vanity? Where is the husband who weeps over his

passivity and the years lost in leading his family? Where is the wife who weeps over her un-submissive and critical spirit? Where is the young person who weeps over his sin of cheating and lust, or her sin of talking back and disrespect? Where is the Christian (in this world) who reads the news and sees the sin in our world and just weeps?

When is the last time you shed a tear over your sin that sent Jesus to the cross? When is the last time your heart broke because of what Jesus had to go through for you? Blessed are you when you are brokenhearted over your sin. Blessed are you when tears fill your eyes at the thought of what your sin cost Jesus Christ.

I know this isn't easy. It's a tough text, but we need to hear it. And so, let me close with this. Two things: First, during this next song (as we sing it), and (in a few moments) as we come forward to receive communion, be thinking about the sin in your life and the price Jesus had to pay. And as you do, if a tear comes to your eye, don't try to stop it. It's OK to cry.

And then, second, later on today (when you go home) and during the week, as you watch that next sitcom, the next reality TV show, the next late night comic, it's OK to laugh. Jesus wants us to laugh. But don't laugh at sin. Don't laugh at what's wrong in this life. When you see it, when you hear it, when you find yourself (caught up in it), rather than laughing, be thinking about the things in your life that need to change and the sin in your life over which you need to weep.

If you want to be happy, maybe it's time to cry? "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will find true happiness." Amen.