

"Mourn"

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

- [0:00] Well, good morning, church. Before we dive into our sermon this morning, I want to welcome Pastor Matt and Beck and his family back from their sabbatical.
- It's great to see you all this morning. I trust you're well-rested. It's good to have you back. So would you turn with me again to Matthew chapter 5? Last week we began our study of the Sermon on the Mount, in particular the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount that we call the Beatitudes.
- We're taking one Beatitude each week for eight weeks this summer. Now why are we spending so much time on this one passage of Scripture? Well, because as we said last week, this is Jesus' answer to the most ancient and perhaps most pressing of human questions.
- What does it look like to live a genuinely flourishing life? How do I live a life worth living?
- So let's look again at Matthew chapter 5, verses 1 through 10. We'll be looking at the second Beatitude today, blessed are those who mourn. But let me read the entire passage.
- [1:24] Matthew 5, verses 1 through 10. Let me read. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
- And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- All right, let's pray. Father, we confess that we need your Holy Spirit to be able to read, mark, and learn what you are saying to us this morning.
- [2:32] So, in your kindness, would your Spirit be at work, helping us to know the grace of Christ, that he has won through his life and death and resurrection.
- And as your Spirit uses your word in our hearts this morning, would we become more like our Lord Jesus, to the glory of your name. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen. Amen.
- Well, an article in the Free Press this week documented the rise and fall of the social media app Be Real.
- The idea behind Be Real was that at a random time of the day, you'd get a notification and then you'd simply take a picture of whatever you happened to be doing. Working at your computer, shopping at the grocery store, eating dinner, whatever.
- The idea was that this app would help its users cut through the kind of posturing and posing of typical social media apps and, as the name puts it, help them to be real.

But, the app started to backfire when users started waiting to post their daily picture until they were doing something more interesting.

[3:48] Not just eating dinner, but eating at a hip new restaurant with friends. Not just shopping at the grocery store, but shopping for a trendy new outfit. Besides, who wants to see a bunch of pictures of a friend working at their computer or walking to class?

Right? So, the app eventually kind of plateaued and it will probably die. And the writer of this article, a Columbia student named Jonas Due, he writes near the end of his article, he says, It's always fashionable for young people like me to complain about platforms that promote phoniness and unattainable lifestyles.

The mission of the various alternative apps meant to showcase that real life is seductive. And then he says this, he says, But we can't stand being our true selves for long.

We can't stand being our true selves for long. And if we're honest, that's not just true if you're a college student, right?

That's often true at many, if not most, seasons of our life. How radical then is this second beatitude?

[5:05] Blessed are those who mourn. It seems to go against every fiber of our being. Because if we want to avoid the mundane as much as possible, well, mourning, sadness, we want to avoid that at all costs.

Surely the good life is a life with as little sadness, as little mourning as possible, right? Wrong, Jesus says.

Blessed are those who mourn. And remember what we said last week about that word, blessed. When Jesus says blessed, he's not saying, here's the way to earn God's favor, as if God will bless us if we mourn better.

That's not what the word blessed means here. Rather, when Jesus says, blessed are, he's saying, do you want to see someone who's really learned how to flourish?

Do you want to know what the good life is? It's this sort of person. Blessed are those. Blessed are those who mourn.

[6:21] So how is it that mourning could be part of the genuinely flourishing life? Why are those who mourn blessed?

Now, to consider that, I want to consider Jesus' beatitude here from three angles. First, I want us to think about the wisdom of mourning. And then we're going to look at the depth of true mourning.

And then finally, we'll consider the promise of mourning in this passage. So the wisdom, the depth, and the promise of mourning, of grieving. So consider with me the wisdom of mourning.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. I wonder if you've ever met someone who refuses to mourn. Whenever anything challenging or sad or even tragic happens, they simply put on a happy face and just charge ahead.

Now, there is something to be said for resilience, right, in the face of hardship and loss. But too often, I think, we're not actually being resilient. We're more like the tea kettle on the stove.

[7:31] The fire kind of lights up beneath us. And the water starts heating up inside. But we don't do anything about it. We simply put on a happy face and we just keep on keeping on.

And what eventually happens? At some point, the water hits a boiling point. The kettle erupts in a high-pitched scream. Enough's enough.

You see, friends, you and I live in a fallen world. There is brokenness in our world. There's loss and disappointment.

There's finitude. There's death. We live in a world where dreams don't always come true. Where relationships can bring pain. Where loved ones die before their time.

From small disappointments to major losses, the world we live in is not happy and joyful all the time. But too often, we're like the kettle on the stove.

[8 : 38] The fire's lit beneath us and we just hold it in. We put on a happy face. We quote a Bible verse about joy in the Lord, maybe. We might minimize or even deny that we've experienced anything sad or broken or disappointing or hurtful.

But the water keeps heating up. But the water keeps heating up and eventually we hit a boiling point. A boiling point where we hit deep bitterness.

A boiling point of anger and rage. A boiling point of even lost faith. It all just leaks out.

What's the answer? Jesus says, blessed are those who mourn. You and I need to learn the lost art of lament.

Of grieving the brokenness in the world. Of expressing appropriate sadness when life breaks down. When dreams die.

[9 : 46] When relationships end. When wars rage on. When leaders fail us. Jesus doesn't say, blessed are those who pretend everything is okay. He says, blessed are those who mourn.

Do you realize that in the book of Psalms, that great prayer book of the Old Testament that God gave us. That something like one third to one half of the Psalms are actually laments.

That they're expressions of grief. And what do we see in the ministry of Jesus himself? Jesus' friend, Lazarus, dies? And what does he do?

Does Jesus say, well, you know, I'm going to raise him from the grave in about 15 to 20 minutes. So, no big deal. We're good. No. What does Jesus do? He weeps.

And we see in the life of Jesus that he doesn't just lament the personal loss of a friend. Later, we'll see that he laments the structural fallenness of an entire city.

[10 : 50] One day when looking out over Jerusalem, Jesus weeps because the city is lost and leaderless and has rejected God. Do you remember Psalm 30 that we read earlier in our service?

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning. What a great verse. And we like to jump straight to the end of that verse. Joy comes in the morning. But have we learned how to weep in the night?

This is the wisdom of mourning. There really cannot be comfort unless we learn to mourn, to lament, to grieve. But how do we do it?

How do we do that? For many of us, grieving or lamenting or mourning, it's like a foreign language. It's like a foreign tongue that we don't know how to speak. So, how do we expand our vocabulary?

How do we learn this new language? Well, one way is through the book of Psalms. Here, God gives us words so that we might learn this new language.

[12 : 02] So that we might give voice to the pain and the loss and the fear that we often feel. Often, we don't even feel like we have permission to mourn.

We feel like we're failing if we admit sadness. But in the Psalms, God gives us not just permission. The words themselves express grief and loss and disappointment.

Of many examples we could pick, think of Psalm 6. The psalmist says, I'm weary with my moaning. Every night I flood my bed with tears. I drench my couch with weeping.

My eye wastes away because of grief. It grows weak because of all my foes. And you know, this isn't just a private prayer practice.

Although it is that. But it's not just that. The language of grief must also be communal. Many times, this will be in finding a trusted friend.

[13:07] Who can simply listen as you express your losses. And when the time is right, being that friend for another. After all, the Christian life is not just rejoicing with those who rejoice.

But it's also weeping with those who weep, as Paul says in Romans 12, 15. So this is the wisdom of mourning. It's acknowledging that in a fallen world, a failure to grieve is a failure to be human.

A failure to mourn is simply storing up hurt and loss to our own detriment. So we have to learn to lament. But there's a deeper level here.

If we simply stopped at learning to lament the brokenness in the world, we'd only be seeing half of what Jesus is teaching us here. Certainly, we must learn to lament the brokenness in the world, the losses in our lives.

But at a deeper level, we must learn to mourn something in addition. Something even more painful. This brings us to our second point.

[14:22] The depth of mourning. And what is this depth? It's this. We mourn not just our circumstances. We mourn our sinfulness.

What breaks our heart is not just our losses or our disappointments, but even more, what breaks our heart is our failure to love God as he deserves.

And is this not the most grievous thing? Just think how readily God has made himself known to us. God has shown his divine power and majesty in all the things he has made.

We look at the stars and the skies, the beauty of a universe seemingly fine-tuned to bring forth life. But instead of praising and thanking God, we end up turning our gaze down and worshiping created things.

We let our hearts run after jobs or physique or human praise and ignore the infinite beauty that is God himself. It's like someone has handed us the keys to a brand new BMW i7.

[15:38] Have you seen these? They have like a 31-inch theater screen in the back seat. I don't even know how you watch a screen that big sitting that close to it. But apparently, BMW has figured out how to make one of those, right?

Someone hands you the keys to this fabulously absurd car. And yet we'd rather obsess over our broken Hot Wheels, right?

This is what all of us are like spiritually. How could we? How could we dishonor God so greatly? This God who made us and holds us in being in every second, who gives us every breath.

How could we? How could we? Ought we not mourn the fact that we ignore him and reject him so quickly, so easily? But it's not just that God has made his divine power and majesty so clear to us.

God has also made his mercy and grace abundantly clear to us. For how did our creator respond when we, his creatures, so readily ignored and rejected him?

[16:47] Did he give us what we deserve? Did he punish us for our sins when we forsook his name and treated him so poorly and made a mess of our lives and the world that he made? No.

Instead of sending his just wrath, God the Father sends his own son. His son who emptied himself of glory and took the form of a servant and then became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Paul writes, while we were still weak, still in our sin at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Scarcely will someone die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How could we not mourn our many sins when we consider how greatly Christ has loved us?

You see, God is not some aloof deity who lays down arbitrary laws to destroy our human joy. No. The God of the Bible is the burning heart of love, jealous over us, willing to give himself at infinite cost to win us, his beloved, to rescue us from sin and death.

[18:18] Our sins are not some, you know, our sins are not against some kind of cold first cause of the universe. Our sins are against the living God, whose steadfast love endures forever.

A God whose love is so great, he was willing to cry out from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Do you see the love of Christ for you, friend?

Jesus Christ was willing to put himself in the place of the mourners and to cry the cry of the derelict, of the forsaken, and to be cut off for you.

So it's not just the fallen world that we mourn over. It's our own fallen natures. It's our own brokenness, our own sin.

I wonder, have you ever known real sorrow over your sin? Have you ever mourned your offenses against this God who created you and loved you so much?

[19:34] Have you ever prayed the prayer of tears? The story goes that one day, a younger monk came to Abba Dioscorus, and Abba Dioscorus was weeping.

This younger monk found him weeping. So the young monk asked him, why are you weeping? And this father in the faith, Dioscorus, he replies, I'm weeping for my sins.

And the young monk knew that Dioscorus had led a valiant and holy life for many years, and he said, my father, you don't have any such sins. And Dioscorus told him, truly, my child, if I were allowed to see my sins, three or four men would not be enough to weep for them.

If I were allowed to see my sins, you know, in his mercy, God doesn't show us all of our sins all at once. It would be too much for us.

But the Holy Spirit will show us the tip of the iceberg. And when he does, we must not turn away. We must not minimize or deny, but we should humble ourselves before God.

[20:58] Perhaps we will shed literal tears. Perhaps not. Those kinds of things aren't necessarily under our control. But we can be contrite before the Lord and be sorrowful over our sins.

We can lay our hearts bare before God in genuine sadness over what we've done and what we've left undone, whether it be in thought or word or deed. And this act of mourning our sins before God or doing so corporately in gathered worship like we do every Sunday, confessing our sins to God.

You know, this act that we do of mourning our sinfulness, you know, this act is actually, it's a safe one.

It's safe because this God is a God who makes a promise to those who mourn. And this brings us to our third and final point, the promise of mourning.

What is this promise that Jesus gives? He says, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Comforted.

[22:15] You know, on the surface, it seems like mourning will only increase our pain, right? Only prolong the hurt, only, you know, keep it going. But that's not true. At least not when we're in a relationship with the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because this God promises that those who mourn will be comforted. And what is this comfort? Well, first, it's the comfort of the forgiveness of our sins.

The promise of the gospel is that those who confess their sins to God, who repent of their sins, find forgiveness because of the cross.

Their record is wiped clean. And as we continue on in the Christian life, God will reveal more and more of our sinfulness. And as he does, we bring this to God in genuine sorrow and repentance.

And as we mourn even those sins that he's shown us, he reminds us then that the cross has already forgiven those sins as well. You see, no matter how deep the cold ice goes in the iceberg of our hearts, no matter how deep our stony hearts are revealed, if we are in Christ, the grace of God is found to be there.

[23 : 42] No matter how deep we go, even before we've seen the icy depths of our sin, there too is the mercy of the cross. Here is the comfort for those who mourn, a comfort that we are reconciled to God by his grace.

Though our sins are great, his grace is even greater. But this comfort is not just the comfort of present forgiveness, it's also the comfort of future restoration.

You see, to understand the Beatitudes, we have to see something very important, and we didn't spend a lot of time on this last week. These statements of Jesus about how human life is meant to be lived, about how to live a genuinely flourishing human life, in order to really understand them, we have to see that they are radically God-centered, and they are future-oriented.

In other words, the life worth living, according to Jesus, is a life with the reality of God in the center, and it's also a life with the story of God's redemption for its plot, for its arc, for its shape.

Jesus came announcing God's kingdom, God's reign, that would put an end to sin, and evil, and suffering, and wrong, and one day, that kingdom will be all in all when Christ, the King, returns in glory to renew creation, and then, in the new heavens and new earth, there will be no more sickness, or crying, or pain.

[25 : 21] The book of Revelation tells us He will wipe every tear from our eyes. Those who mourn will be comforted.

You see, those who try to ignore the pain of this world and try to ignore the sin in our own hearts, you know, that might look like a sort of strategy that leads to joy, that leads to happiness, but that way of living is very short-sighted because there's a kingdom coming where the mourners will be comforted, not the comfortable.

And the truth is, if you know nothing of mourning now, then there will be no place for you in that kingdom then. On the other hand, if you are acquainted with mourning now, Jesus says, you will be comforted.

When the king comes in his glory, because this king knows what it means to weep, to be sorrowful. Man of sorrows he was called.

So brothers and sisters, if you weep now, then you belong to him and you will be comforted. And you know, if we know this twin comfort, if we begin to experience this twin comfort, the forgiveness of sins and the comfort of our future hope, it means that those who mourn now are actually the greatest agents of God's kingdom in the present.

[27 : 05] Nicholas Wolterstorff, one-time philosopher of religion here at Yale, he wrote this, reflecting on this beatitude. He said, who are the mourners?

He says, the mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God's new day, who ache with all their being for that day's coming, and who break out into tears when confronted with its absence.

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace, there's no one blind, and who ache whenever they see someone unseeing. They are the ones who realize that in God's realm there's no one hungry and who ache whenever they see someone starving.

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm there's no one falsely accused and who ache whenever they see someone imprisoned unjustly. unjustly. They are the ones who realize that in God's realm, there's no one who fails to see God and who ache whenever they see someone unbelieving.

They are the ones who realize that in God's realm, there's no one who suffers oppression and who ache whenever they see someone beat down. They're the ones who realize that in God's realm, there's no one without dignity and who ache whenever they see someone treated with indignity. They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there's neither death nor tears and who ache whenever they see someone crying tears over death. Who are the mourners?

[28 : 49] Walter Storff puts it this way. He says, the mourners are the aching visionaries. The mourners are the aching visionaries. Friends, may God make us a church of aching visionaries who mourn for a world in need of God's reign and who bring comfort to a hurting world because we know the day of his comfort is coming soon.

Let's pray together. Father, by your Holy Spirit, make us a church that truly mourns. Make us a church of aching visionaries. May we mourn our own sins first and foremost and be humble. May we learn to mourn with those who mourn and may we long for your kingdom to come. Come soon, Lord Jesus, in your name we pray. Amen.