

September 2, 2015

Godly Sorrow

Matthew 5:4 (NASB), **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

Over the last few days we have been taking a look at Matthew 5:4 in which Christ in the Beatitudes tells us that those who **“mourn”** will be “blessed” and “comforted.” What we have learned is that there is improper mourning and proper mourning. Today we are going to see that there is also Godly mourning which is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ is talking about in this well-known verse.

The Lord is indeed concerned about legitimate sorrows and in fact promises to console, comfort, and strengthen His children when we turn to Him for help. This however is not the kind of sorrow and mourning that is at issue here in this verse. What Jesus is addressing is godly sorrow, godly mourning, mourning that only those who desire to belong to Him or who already belong to Him can experience.

In 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 Paul wrote, **“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you.”** The only type of mourning that brings spiritual life and spiritual growth is godly sorrow, which is sorrow over sin that leads one to repentance. Godly sorrow is linked to repentance and repentance is linked to sin.

The first beatitude which is **“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”** makes clear that entrance into the kingdom of heaven starts with being **“poor in spirit.”** What this means is that one realizes and understands their complete and utter spiritual bankruptcy. The only way that one can come to Jesus Christ is empty-handed, totally destitute and pleading for God’s mercy and grace. Without a sense of spiritual poverty no one can enter the kingdom of heaven. And when we enter the kingdom we should never lose that sense as it says in Romans 7:18 of knowing **“that nothing good dwells in [us], that is, in [our] flesh.”**

What one must understand is that spiritual poverty leads to godly sorrow. Those that are **“poor in spirit”** become **“those who mourn.”** In Psalm 51:3-4 David wrote, **“For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.”** After having committed his great sin with Bathsheba and then attempting to cover it up by murdering her husband David repents and expresses his deep godly sorrow over his **“transgressions.”**

In our discussion on the first beatitude we learned of the Greek word *makarios* which is translated to mean “**blessed**” and it means to be happy, blissful. That happiness then is a divine pronouncement that assured benefit of those who meet the conditions that God requires.

The condition then of the second beatitude is that of mourning. “**Blessed are those who mourn.**” There are nine different Greek words that are used in the New Testament to speak of sorrow. This reflects the commonness of the sorrow in humankind's existence. Sorrow and mourning are woven into the very fabric of who we are as people. The story of history is largely the story of sorrow. Before things get better here on earth Scripture warns that they will get worse. Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:7-8 that before He comes again, “**For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.**”

The term that is used here in Matthew 5:4 for sorrow is the Greek word *pentheo*, “**mourn**” is the strongest and the most severe. This was most often used to describe the grief that one would feel over the death of a loved one. It was used in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) to describe the grief that Jacob experienced when he thought his beloved son Joseph was dead in Genesis 37:34. It was used to describe the disciples in Mark 16:10 as they mourned over the death of Jesus before they knew that He would be resurrected.

The word carries with it the idea of a deep inner agony, which may or may not be expressed outwardly with weeping, wailing, or lament. When David stopped hiding his sin and began mourning over it instead and then confessed it then he could declare in Psalm 32:1-2, “**How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**”

The world though tells us to paste smiles on our faces and ignore our troubles. We are told to hide our troubles and our problems and just pretend to be happy. Jesus however calls on us to “confess your sins and mourn, mourn, mourn.” When we do that our smiles can be genuine, because our happiness will be the real thing. Godly mourning brings godly happiness, which no amount of human effort or optimistic pretense and no amount of positive thinking can produce.

James 4:8-10 says, “**Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.**”

Tragically in today's evangelical culture there is much frivolity, silliness, and foolishness that goes on in the name of Christianity. Instead the church should be mourning over sin. God's counsel to the frivolously happy in James 4 is to “**be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into gloom.**”

Much of the church today has a defective sense of sin, which is reflected in a defective sense of humor. When even its own members make the church the butt of jokes, make light of the beliefs and ordinances of the church. When they caricature their leaders as inept and clownish, and

make the high standards of purity and righteousness the subject of humorous commentary, then the church has a great need to turn laughter into mourning.

The Bible does indeed recognize a proper sense of humor, humor that is not at the expense of God's name, God's Word, His church, or any person, except perhaps us. God knows as it says in Proverbs 17:22 that **“a joyful heart is good medicine.”** But a heart that rejoices in sin is taking poison, not medicine. The way to happiness is not in ignoring sin, much less in making light of it, but rather in sorrow over it with cries to God.

We react to our spiritual bankruptcy in one of several ways. Like the Pharisees we can deny our true spiritual condition and pretend that we are something other than what we really are. We can also, like the monastics and legalists admit our condition and then try to change it all in our own power and in our own efforts. Or we can admit our condition and then despair over it to such a degree that we try to drown it in drugs, alcohol, sex, or other activities that bring shame to us and dishonor God. Or we can give up completely and commit suicide as some do. Because they find no answer in themselves or in the world, these people conclude that there is no answer. Or, like the prodigal son, we can admit our true condition, mourn over it, and turn to the heavenly Father to remedy our poverty.

True mourning over sin is not me focused. It focuses instead on God, who alone can forgive and remove our sin. This is why David prayed and cried out to God that he had sinned **“against You and You alone.”** It is the attitude that begins when we enter the kingdom and lasts as long as we are on earth. It is the attitude of Romans 7. Despite how some interpret this passage, Paul is not speaking simply about his former condition. The problems of chapter 7 were not one time experiences that were completely replaced by the victories of chapter 8. Paul writes in Romans 7:15, **“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”** He uses the present tense here, as he does throughout the rest of this chapter. In verses 18-19 he writes, **“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.”** Then in verse 21 says, **“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.”** Then in verses 24-25 he says, **“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other; with my flesh the law of sin.”**

Paul wrote these words at the height of his ministry. The mark then of the mature life in Christ is not sinlessness, which is reserved for heaven, but growing awareness of sinfulness. 1 John 1:8-9 says, **“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** The subjects of God's kingdom, His children, the forgiven ones, who are then joint heirs with the Son – are characterized by the continuous confession of their sins.

Tomorrow we will look then at the result of Godly sorrow and mourning.