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Matthew 5:4

2nd Message

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THE MOURNERS

SERIES: LIVING RIGHT SIDE UP IN AN UPSIDE DOWN WORLD

The 2006 movie, *Amazing Grace*, tells the story of William Wilberforce and his nearly 30-year campaign to abolish slavery in England in the early 1800s. Wilberforce's friend and advisor in that campaign was John Newton, who as many of you know was the captain of a slave-trading ship for many years and who, after renouncing slavery, wrote the great hymn *Amazing Grace*. The story is told that while reading the 14th century classic, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, Newton came to realize his need for a Savior. One of the most powerful scenes in the movie unfolds as Wilberforce visits the aging, blind Newton while he dictates his account of his years as a slave trader and urges Wilberforce to use his confession to propel the abolitionist campaign. As Newton tries to capture his spiritual transformation, he recalls, "Though I am losing my memory, I remember two things very clearly: I'm a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." Through tears he observes, "I'm weeping. I couldn't weep before," concluding ultimately, "I once was blind, but now I see. Didn't I write that too?"

What causes a grown man to weep? What causes a grown woman to weep? It's not something we see everyday. *Big Boys Don't Cry. Big Girls Don't Cry*. At least that's the rallying cry of our culture. It's not cool to cry. "We take our page out of the John Wayne handbook: Suck it up, tough it through, praise God, and pass the ammunition."¹

I know that's how I grew up. I grew up on a farm in back country Pennsylvania and no one would ever catch me crying, I guarantee it. When I was about 12, I had a grown cow (over 1000 lbs!) step on my foot and man did that hurt. And, I sat there and punched and punched that milk cow and it would not move. Man did it hurt, but I did not cry! I was tough and I was proud that I didn't cry. Why? Because it's not cool to cry.

Yet, Jesus says, "Blessed are you if you do weep, if you do mourn." That's the second Beatitude in his Sermon on the Mount, which is where we will spend most of our time today, but I'd like to first review a bit from last week to set the stage for today.

Review

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5-7. The context for the sermon is the Gospel message. The Gospel is a fact: the Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus. The Gospel message is also an invitation: repent, turn around, and trust this good news. So, whatever we do with the Sermon, we cannot separate it from the Gospel message. If we separate it from the Gospel message, we are in danger of seeing this great sermon as impractical idealism or crushing legalism. What this boils down to then, is that nothing in the Sermon is the result of our self-effort. It is a result of the Gospel working in our lives.

Neither are these qualities in the sermon natural. They are not natural human qualities. You aren't born with them. We are all born upside-down in every part of our being. Jesus does not go into Galilee looking for Beatitude people. They do not exist. Jesus

goes into Galilee looking for upside-down sinners. He calls them to Himself, and as a result of being in contact with Him, people are transformed into Beatitude people. Everything is a result of the Gospel invading our lives.

As I said last week, there is effort involved. It's not osmosis. We can't go to sleep with the Bible next to us, and in the morning, wake up as Beatitude people. We tried that in high school Physics class and it didn't work. It doesn't work here either. There is effort involved on our part. Many of you resonated with the quote from Dallas Willard from last week: "Effort but not earning."² The gospel transforms us from the inside out as we actively participate.

- There still needs to be tough decisions and tough choices.
- There still needs to be intentionality and discipline in our lives.
- We need to put ourselves into good places.
- As this happens, slowly and surely we are transformed into the image of Christ.
- We are slowly turned right side up.

Beatitudes As a Whole

As we talked a little last week, the Sermon begins with eight beatitudes – eight be-attitudes – eight attitudes of the heart—eight statements that begin with the word 'Blessed.' I like to simply translate 'Blessed' as 'right-side up.' This word refers to God's assessment of me, not to my assessment of myself. So, right side up are the poor in spirit, right side up are the mournful, right side up are the meek, etc. Now that we are moving onto the next Beatitude, I'd like to make two observations about the Beatitudes as a whole – about these first 8 statements of this great sermon.

The first observation is this: these eight be-attitudes or heart attitudes are of the same person, not eight different people. John Stott says this:

These are not eight separate and distinct groups of disciples, some of whom are meek, while others are merciful and yet others are called upon to endure persecution. They are rather eight qualities of the same group who at one and the same time are meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourning and hungry, peacemakers and persecuted.³

In other words, Jesus is not saying that when the Gospel takes root in our lives, one of us will become poor in spirit, one of us will become mournful, one of us will become meek. He is saying that each person that throws their weight upon the Gospel at some point ought to become poor in spirit, mournful, meek, pure in heart, etc. All eight qualities are true of all people who are being turned right side up by the Gospel.

Having said that though, brings us to my second observation: the order of these eight statements is important. They are in a specific

order, and it all begins with being poor in spirit. As we talked about last week, it all begins with desperate dependency, which sets the tone for the entire sermon. We are entirely dependent upon Christ and his empowering spirit to transform us into his image, to turn us right side up in this upside-down world.

The Mourners

That brings us to Beatitude #2: Matthew 5:4.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Right side up are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

I don't know about you, but this one really invokes a 'Really, Jesus?' I feel like this one is the most stunning of all. If nothing else, it certainly feels the most upside-down to me.

J. Barrie Shepherd probably captures this feeling best in his book, *Prayers from the Mount*. He says this about this Beatitude:

Lord, you might as well say,

"Full are the hungry,"

"Healthy are the sick," even

"Alive are the dead."

How can anyone make sense of it?

Indeed, it seems to make no sense.⁴

I have a 5 year old and 7 year old at home right now and one day we were walking to school, and, as we walked, each one of them was trying to be first in line (while still walking). And, I thought I would be a good dad and make it a teaching moment so I threw out some wisdom to them by saying, "Well, you know, the first will be last and the last will be first." And, my daughter Sydney, stopped in her tracks, looked up at me and said, "Dad, that doesn't make any sense."

Well, that's exactly how I feel with this Beatitude – it makes no sense. It's upside-down, just like the last being first.

"Jesus, isn't the Christian life supposed to bring joy? In fact, didn't You say in Your parable of the soils that those with fertile soil receive the Word with 'joy'? And, in Your parable of the treasure in the field, the man who finds it goes with 'joy' and sells all he has and buys that field. And, in the parable of the talents, You instruct those good and faithful servants to share in Your joy? I thought the Christian life was about joy, Jesus."

Blessed are the mourners.

What is Jesus talking about here and why is this an attitude in this list? Why is this one of the beatitudes?

Well, to begin with, a close look at the word for mourn shows that this word is one of the strongest possible words for grief in the Greek language. This is a deep, piercing sorrow. This is to truly have a broken heart. Not moping. Not moaning. This is not the kind of crying that happens in movie theatres. This is not the sentimentality one feels from a sappy love song. This is deep, deep grief, the kind of sorrow you feel when you lose a loved one. It is the same word used in Mark 16 of those who are mourning the death of Christ. One writer defines this kind of mourning as "A passionate grief that leads to corresponding action."⁵

Before we get into why Jesus chooses to put this in this Beatitude list, I'd like to make two quick observations about this Beatitude:

First, this Beatitude gives us the freedom to grieve.

Jesus openly weeps at the grave of Lazarus. He openly weeps over Jerusalem. It turns out big boys do cry. For any of you who have been in our church for any length of time, you know that this is Brian Morgan's gift to our church. He certainly knows how to cry and, in fact I think his line is something like, "if nothing else, before I go, I will teach you all to cry." Maybe this is his theme verse. This beatitude gives us the freedom to grieve.

As I pointed out in the introduction, we don't feel that freedom in our culture do we? Sadness, unhappiness, mourning, weeping and crying are all things to be avoided at all cost. In fact, our consumerist culture is built on entertainment so that we will not face the serious things in our lives, namely our sadness and mourning. So, without this freedom, we typically deny the pain, we dodge the pain or we distract ourselves from the pain all to our great detriment. Counselors will tell you that mourning and tears are part of the healing process and without them, the process is hindered. As Eugene Peterson once said, "Weeping washes the wounds clean and leaves them to heal."⁶ I know many of us in here are grieving. The back of the bulletin shows just a glimpse of the grief in this room. I hope you all feel the freedom to grieve from this Beatitude.

Second, the Christian life is not just a life of happiness and joy.

I wish it were but the truth is that it's not. John Stott says,

Some Christians seem to imagine that, especially if they are filled with the Spirit, they must wear a perpetual grin on their face and be continuously boisterous and bubbly. How unbiblical can one become? The truth is that there are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us ever weep them.⁷

A few hundred years ago, to be a Christian meant one had to be miserable. It appears we've swung the pendulum too far the other way. The fact is that there are times of great joy in the Christian life, but there are also times of great sorrow as well.

So, why does Jesus bless the mourners? What is it about mourning that makes us right side up? There are probably many reasons but we can't talk about all of them. I will give you two today.

1. We observe our own sin

When we meet Jesus, we come face to face with the sin in our lives. We are broken, sinful people, and we don't realize it until we meet Jesus. Dave Roper once said, "We are thrown into this world like a baseball with a spin on it; in time, we break and the curve is always down and away."⁸ We live East of Eden. We sin. We sin a lot. We are good at it. With John Newton we learn to say, "We are great sinners; but Christ is a great Savior." When we meet Jesus, we finally recognize that we are broken – that we are curve balls. The good news, though, is that we have a great Savior that does not condemn us. That's really good news.

- To the woman caught in adultery, the first words Jesus says to her are, "I don't condemn you." His first words are not "you filthy, no good woman." His first words aren't even, "Go and sin no more." They are, "I don't condemn you." Jesus came into this world not to condemn the world, but to save it (Jn 3:17).
- Although you mourn over your sin, you have a Savior who does not condemn you. You are loved, you are accepted, you have a Savior who goes to bat for you, who has your back. So, don't give up. Be patient with yourself.

- When we come face to face with him, he doesn't condemn us. What happens when we meet Him is that, in Him, we realize what we were created to be—the perfectly right side up person, the people Adam and Eve were created as—but then we see ourselves. And, we realize how far we have missed the mark, how full of sin we are, and we mourn.
- Paul most clearly says this when he says, “Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). Paul does not have low self-esteem. Paul is wrestling with the sin that is so pervasive in his life. Although he is a disciple of Christ, he continues to do what he doesn't want to do and doesn't do what he does want to do. He is mourning over his sin.
- Do I mourn over my sin? And, the harder question for me is – do I mourn over my sin to the point that it brings accompanying action? I sit at home at night at the end of the day, and as I think through the day, I am sometimes horrified by the thoughts I had that day, and the things I did. Does that happen to anyone else? In the presence of Jesus, we rejoice, but then we mourn over our shortcomings, and we go to our knees for help with the accompanying action.
- As we mature in our faith, our mourning will intensify. As we are turned more and more right side up, we are more and more convicted – we notice how we sin more. Honestly, it's a little bit depressing. Don't you wish Jesus would just turn us right side up immediately? Once again, Paul is our example. Bible scholars make note of this: there is a progression in his writings as he was slowly turned right side up.
 1. In 1 Corinthians 15:9, written between 53 and 57 AD, he says, “I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an Apostle.”
 2. Then, in Ephesians 3:8, written around 8 years later, he says, “I am the very least of all the saints.”
 3. Then, finally, about 3 years after that, in 1 Timothy 1:15, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

Did you hear the progress? From least of the apostles to the least of the saints to the foremost of all sinners. Paul slowly was becoming right side up. So, this is number one – mourning is blessed by the Lord because when we observe our own sin, we mourn.

2. We observe the state of the world.

The second reason that mourners are right side up is that in Jesus, they see what the kingdom of heaven is all about. And, when they see it, they notice the kingdoms of the world around them, and they mourn over the differences.

- The mourners mourn over the state of the world as it is and cry out, “it doesn't have to be this way!”⁹
- Don't you read the newspaper everyday and your heart breaks and you mourn? The violence, kidnappings, the homeless epidemic in our country and around the world, racial discrimination, environmental abuse, white collar crime and the list goes on.
- Don't you mourn when you watch TV and see the super-sexualized state of our society? I mourn for our kids now a days, and what they have to deal with every day in this area.

- Do you shed tears as the Psalmist did in Psalm 119:136, “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”

That's the mourning Jesus is talking about. As I was studying the Sermon on the Mount last fall, my alma mater, Penn State University, suffered a terrible scandal. An ex-football coach was accused of molesting young boys, really awful stuff. As the situation tore apart the fabric of the university and tore apart every alumni's heart, I did a lot of mourning and still do. The world is in desperate need of our great Savior. Everyday we all interact with people who do not know Jesus and His gospel. Lots of people all over the world will walk through life today not knowing Jesus. And, the mourners see it and ache for them.

If the poor in spirit are the desperately dependent, the mourners are the authentically vulnerable. The mourners are those who see the world as it is and themselves as they are, and who dare to feel the pain.¹⁰

The Comforted

But, we do not stop there – the mourners will be comforted. This is the good news. When we trust our lives to Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit is our helper, our encourager and our strengthener. The Holy Spirit is God present with us, along side of us, here with us.

And, this word *comfort* is actually the verb form of the same word Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit. The word means to be encouraged by being with or to be strengthened by being with. So, what Jesus is saying is, if you allow yourself to authentically mourn, to be authentically vulnerable, your heart will be encouraged and strengthened. How does that happen?

When we authentically mourn the state of our broken world, the Holy Spirit comes along side us and encourages us, reminding us that God's kingdom has invaded this world, has permeated through this world and is in the process of transforming it. And, nothing can stop it! It's the most powerful force in the world.

Or, when we authentically mourn the state of our broken lives, the Holy Spirit whispers to us, “Remember, Jesus paid it all. Your guilt is removed. Your sins are forgiven. You are white as snow in His eyes!”¹¹ This is the paradox of the Christian life: your great sorrow leads to great joy, and without sorrow there can be no joy.¹²

So, what causes a person to truly weep? It's when one clearly sees that they are a great sinner. But, then, those tears are transformed into tears of joy because they then clearly see their great Savior. This leads them to then sing John Newton's personal testimony:

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me...
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.*

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Amen

1. Alan Andrews, *The Kingdom Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2010), 185.
2. Alan Andrews, 93.
3. John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978), 31.
4. J. Barrie Shepherd, *Prayer from the Mount* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 17.
5. Darrell Johnson, *Living In Sync: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Regent Audio; ISBN/Product ID: 3411).
6. Eugene Peterson, *Beatitudes*, (Regent Audio, ISBN/Product ID: 2232).
7. John Stott, 41.
8. Dave Roper, *Psalms 23: the Song of a Passionate Heart* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1994), 78.
9. Darrell Johnson
10. Darrell Johnson
11. Darrell Johnson
12. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959-60), 49.

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