

Matthew 5:4; Luke 7:36-50
Healing for the Brokenhearted
Grace UMC
July 19, 2009

Several weeks ago we began our study of Jesus' beatitudes. Each of these eight beatitudes begin with the word, "blessed". Some English translations use the word, "Happy". In the beatitudes Jesus shows us the path that leads to a life of blessing and happiness. The word *beatitude* actually comes from a Latin word *beatus*, a word that refers to someone who experiences a state of happiness or well-being in the depths of their soul.

What is so striking about Jesus' Beatitudes is how contrary they are to the way we usually think about life. They are counter-intuitive. The people Jesus calls blessed are the ones we would normally pity. Bryan Wilkerson suggests a list of the kinds of people we would normally consider to be blessed, people who we think have it made:

- Blessed are the rich and famous, because they can always get a seat at the best restaurants.
- Blessed are the good-looking, for they shall be on the cover of *People* magazine.
- Blessed are those who party, for they know how to have fun.
- Blessed are those who take first place in the division, for they shall have momentum going into the play-offs.
- Blessed are the movers and shakers, for they shall make a name for themselves.
- Blessed are those who demand their rights, for they shall not be overlooked.
- Blessed are the healthy and fit, because they don't mind being seen in a bathing suit.
- Blessed are those who make it to the top, because they get to look down on everyone else.

In contrast Jesus says:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Of all the Beatitudes, the one that is perhaps most counter-intuitive is the second one, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." It seems illogical. It's like saying "Happy are those who are sad." It doesn't make any sense. Who in their right mind wants to mourn? We congratulate those whose eyes are lined with laughter; but Jesus congratulates those whose eyes are flooded with tears.

The question before us is why? Why would Jesus say, "Blessed are those who mourn"?

I believe that one of the reasons is that mourners have enough sensitivity to hurt. In our culture we are taught to avoid hurt and loss. We continually try to distance ourselves from disease and death. What we end up doing is becoming numb. If we pursue happiness and avoid hurting, we become numb and grow increasingly unhappy; witness Michael Jackson and Owen Wilson and a whole lot of others who have had it all and died tragically or at least attempted suicide.

If we are going to experience the blessing Jesus describes, if we are going to look more like Jesus, it has to begin with a change of heart - that's what we learned from the first beatitude. The path to God's fullest blessing begins with a change of heart, recognizing that we are spiritually poor. The second beatitude teaches us that to be Christ-like people we must have **broken hearts**, too.

To mourn is to feel and express grief, usually over some kind of loss. Most often it's the loss of a person, but it could also be the loss of a job, or a relationship, or our health, or a season of life. When we mourn something, we don't just feel the loss, we express the loss, we announce it publicly. We're telling the world and ourselves that life will never be quite the same.

The Jewish custom of sitting *shiva* is an example of what it means to mourn. Traditionally, when a close relative dies in a Jewish family, they sit *shiva* for seven days. Family members sit on stools or the floor to show that they have been "brought low" by their loss. There will be no housework or normal activity around the house for those seven days. People will often make a tear in their outer garment or wear a torn piece of ribbon on their chest to show that the fabric of their lives has been rent. When guests come to call, they are not to initiate conversation, and if they speak, they are not to speak of the loved one. The purpose of sitting *shiva* isn't to distract from the grief, but rather to intensify it—to feel the loss deeply and together.

To mourn is to be broken-hearted. The Bible teaches that the heart is the control center of a person's life; thought, emotions, and will flow from and through the heart. When we say we're broken-hearted, we're saying that the deepest part of us, and every part of us, has been affected. When your heart's been broken, you don't just "get over it". You think differently, you feel differently, and you live differently because of it.

When Jesus referred to "those who mourn," he was certainly thinking of people who had lost loved ones or homes or jobs or health. Certainly there were many in that great crowd who had suffered those kinds of losses. But in the same way that "the poor in

spirit" looks beyond material poverty, so "those who mourn" looks beyond physical losses. Jesus was thinking of spiritual losses as well—the loss of innocence, the loss of faith, the loss of hope.

Ultimately, the mourning that Jesus is speaking of is mourning over sin. It's the mourning that's described in Psalm 119:136, "Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed." It's the mourning of Ezra the scribe, when he heard that the people of Israel had taken pagan wives and foreign gods. He tore his garments, pulled hair from his beard and his head, got down on his hand and knees before God and said, "I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens." Blessed are those who mourn, Jesus said, whose hearts are broken over their sin, and the sin of the world.

The Bible describes Jesus as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." There are two occasions in which we see Jesus weeping. He wept with Mary and Martha over the death of their beloved brother Lazarus. He wept over the loss of his close friend. Perhaps, he wept because of the sadness all around him. Perhaps, he was mourning the lack of faith on the part of those who had been with him so long,, but now felt it was too late for him to do anything. Perhaps, he was mourning the hostility and hypocrisy of those in the crowd who were already plotting his death. Everything that was wrong with world was on display outside the tomb in Bethany - sickness, death, loss, hatred, unbelief. It broke Jesus' heart, because this was not what God had in mind for human beings. So he wept.

The second time Jesus wept is recorded in Luke 19:41-44. It was Palm Sunday, the day of his triumphal entry to the holy city. Crowds of people are lining the road into the city, praising God and cheering his name. But as Jesus comes around a bend in the mountains, the city comes into view, and this is what we read:

"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build and embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Here it is, one of the best and brightest days on the Jesus tour. Everybody loves a parade, right? But Jesus knows what's going on in the hearts of religious and political leaders in that city. He knows the deceit, the cowardice, the cruelty, and the injustice that is going to unfold in the days to come. He knows that some in that cheering crowd will in a few days turn against him and call for his blood. It broke his heart. The city could have known peace. The people could have known joy. The nation could have welcomed their long-awaited Savior. Instead, they were about to reject him and bring disaster on themselves and their children. It was a tragedy, and Jesus wept over it.

Sometimes I've wept like that. Maybe you have too. I weep when people I have loved and pastored leave their faith behind because they fell in love with the world or someone else's wife. I weep when kids sell themselves short and think that they have to sex in order to feel loved. I weep when people, youth and adults get hooked on drugs or alcohol and suffer all the losses that go along with their addictions.

Martin Luther mourned the church's erosion of simple faith in the grace of God. John Wesley mourned his contemporary's lack of disciplined piety. William Wilberforce mourned the slave trade. William and Catherine Booth mourned the conditions of the poor in London. Albert Schweitzer mourned the suffering of Africans. Martin Luther King, Jr. mourned racial prejudice; Candy Lightner mourned the death of her daughter and formed MADD - Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." To mourn like Jesus did is to face up to the truth about ourselves and the world. And the truth is that we are a messed up people living in a messed up world. When we finally admit this, when we finally admit that we are sinners, we will find ourselves mourning.

Jesus was very intentional about the order of the Beatitudes. Recognizing that we are "poor in spirit" is where transformation begins. But right on the heels of that comes an even more sobering discovery - that we are sinners. We are not just poor in spirit, we are sinners. The truth is that we have to recognize both if we want to be changed.

The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, was deeply aware of her spiritual poverty and sin. Weeping at the feet of Jesus, washing his feet with her tears, she mourned. Then Jesus said to her, "your sins are forgiven." Indeed she was comforted.

Now she was happy in a way that she could never have anticipated. This is the truth, if we truly mourn, we shall rejoice, we shall be truly happy, and we shall be comforted. This is the astounding thing about the Christian life. Our great sorrow leads to an even greater joy. But without godly sorrow and repentance, there is no joy. Friends, this cycle of sorrow and repentance is meant to last for the rest of our lives until there is no more sin for which to mourn. If we face our pain, if we face reality and mourn it we are set free to experience the joy and complete comfort of God.

As we face the pain of our sin and sinfulness our hearts will begin breaking over the things that break God's heart. We'll find that we can no longer live in a sinful world without mourning. When our hearts break as God's heart breaks, we will find ourselves becoming instruments of God's healing and comfort. Those who mourn as God mourns transform their tears into action.

Behind almost every hospital and hospice and food bank and school and social service agency is someone who grieved over a human need - grieved deeply enough to do the hard work of making a difference.

Most of us know at least a little about the woman who was called Mother Theresa. Surely few have grieved as deeply as Mother Theresa did over the poor and dying in the streets of Calcutta. She mourned for them. But those who visited her Home for the Dying came away testifying to experiencing a great joy so overwhelming that they couldn't find words to express it. This is the great paradox: great mourners are great even greater rejoicers. In opening the door to our pain and the world's pain, we also open it to joy. People who don't mourn, who slam the door on all sorrow never feel the deepest delights of God's comfort. But those sensitive enough to be crushed by sadness find themselves overflowing with joy.

Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." As we close let me give you three reasons why we can take comfort today.

First, sins can be forgiven. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's true whether you're coming to God for the first time with a boatload of sin, or you're coming to God for the hundredth time with the same old sin. You can walk out of here today forgiven - as if your heart had never been broken.

Secondly, there is life beyond the grave. Most of the mourning we do in this life is over death, the loss of someone special. We ought to mourn death and loss, because it hurts, and it's not what God intended for us. But Jesus has conquered death. As surely as he raised Lazarus to life that afternoon in Bethany, he can raise you to life again, and those you love as well, through faith in his name. We don't have to lose our loved ones forever.

Third, a better world is coming. Everything that's wrong with this world will one day be made right. The Bible ends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city coming down from heaven. This city will be nothing like the Jesus wept over—nothing like the cities we live in. In the holy city, there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away, and Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes.

The heartbreak gospel means we don't have to put on plastic smiles when we come to church. We can come to church feeling as sad or mad or bad as we need to. We can sit in the pew and weep if we need to. In fact, we should sometimes. If we're not weeping, we're not paying attention. Then we can leave here with a smile—a real one—knowing that sins can be forgiven, that there's life beyond the grave, and that a better world is coming.