

Title: Good Grief!
Text: Matthew 5.4
Theme: Godly grief
Series: Matthew #13
Prop Stmt: Only those who mourn over sin can experience the true comfort of God.

Justin Martyr was a leader in the early church during the time when Christianity was against the law and when all followers of Christ joined the church with the understanding that they may be executed as a result. Justin was a voice for his congregation who wrote to the Roman Emperor, Antoninus Pius, "You can kill us, but you cannot harm us." What is it that gives a people such convictional boldness? They believed that Jesus was, who he claimed to be, and they believed that what he said was worth staking their very lives on it. Beloved, that is the kind of people, we are called to be and my agenda is, by God's grace to pray, preach, push, pull, call, convict, and convince to get us there. Therefore, as I preach this morning, my aim is not to simply inform you of what Jesus said in his first publicly recorded sermon as he lays out a definition of and description of his kingdom. I aim to turn your world upside down and your thinking inside out. We serve a King who is unlike any other. Therefore, his kingdom is unlike any other. Therefore his subjects, his followers are called to live unlike any other.

Read Text:

What is it that brings you comfort? For many of us, we think of food. There is an entire category called comfort food that is ranked on the basis of fattiness, carbs, homey-ness (the sense of sentiment and nostalgia) and warm bubbles. That last one refers to the dual sensory experience of warm steam enveloping your face as you lift the lid and inhale the aroma. Perhaps you think of sitting on the beach, or on a boat with the sun baking your skin especially after this winter that refuses to end. For others, comfort is the familiar cabin, or the familiar chair. It is grandma's house, or a Sunday afternoon ride on your motorcycle or in your convertible with the wind in your face. For others, it is just being with friends, playing games, sharing stories, or watching baseball. Most of us connect the idea of comfort with things that are familiar. But, few of us, if any of us would say that mourning brings us comfort. In fact, if you were reading this for the first time, you would quite possibly think that either Jesus misspoke, or someone did not record it correctly. This sounds crazy if you read it all by itself, but it does not appear all by itself. Go back to v.3 and ask yourself this question: How does being poor in spirit (humble) relate to mourning? Or, better yet, how does being poor in spirit produce mourning?

Christ does not see mourning as our enemy. Although we may try to do everything that we can to avoid it, there is obviously something that is so good about going through grief that Christ calls the person who mourns – blessed. How is that possible? Because you and I have known a lot of people who have gone through grief and it has not been well with their soul. Their grief was and continues to be bitter.

How can grief; how can mourning be good? Mourning will not be good and will not bring blessing and will not bring comfort, unless we are poor in spirit. If, however, we are poor in spirit, then mourning will result in comfort.

Note this: If I am poor in spirit, I am surprised by grace. If I am not poor in spirit, if I think that I deserve a break, while everyone else deserves justice, then I am not surprised by grace. A proud person expects grace and presumes that it is fair. So, when a proud person suffers, he is shocked! What's this? I don't deserve this! Look at all the good that I have done. Is that how I get treated? Is this the thanks that I receive? The fact that we are surprised by suffering reveals that we are not surprised by grace. If we were surprised by grace, we would not be surprised by suffering. However, if I am poor in spirit; that is, if I recognize that God does not owe me anything good, then anything good that comes my way is a surprise and I accept it with joy realizing that I do not deserve it.

But, understand this. God loves to do good for his children. That does not make us deserving; it is simply a statement of his affection and care. The fact that we live with suffering is not a slight by God. God knows the suffering that we endure. He is not calloused or indifferent to it. This statement by Christ is proof positive of that. He knows that we mourn. He knows that we groan. He knows that we grieve. He has not promised to relieve us of our mourning now. He has promised to relieve us of our mourning later. And this promise is so certain that you can find comfort in it. And when you do, you are blessed. Let's unpack this a bit.

1. **Happy are the Sad** (4a)

A. Review of blessed

Can you remember what it means to be blessed? A blessed person is one who is in the position of being favored by God. Therefore, Christ is saying that those who mourn are in a position to be favored by God. That is very difficult for us to believe and embrace with our whole being. When you think about it, we spend so much of our energy and time doing things to avoid the very things that would cause us to mourn. We put our children into car seats that will withstand a nuclear attack. We take classes and pursue degrees so that we can have jobs that will provide us with an income to purchase homes that will protect us and cars that will be safe and health insurance that will permit us to stay ahead of problems. We are careful about the foods that we eat. We watch our weight. We exercise. We use sunscreen. We read articles about how to prevent cancer. We put helmets, gloves, kneepads, and elbow pads on our kids when all they want to do is ride a bike. We sign them up for classes, for leagues, for extra-curricular activities so that they will be successful and get a good job so they can buy kneepads for their kids. At the first sign of a runny nose, we run to the doctor and want it treated. Not only that, we have insurance. We have car insurance, health insurance, home insurance, travel insurance, life insurance and disability insurance. All of which feeds this notion that we can insulate ourselves from the problems of life. If we listen to all of the experts, read all

of the articles and follow all of the rules, then we will be safe – right? That is what we want to think, isn't it? We want to avoid anything that is going to bring grief into our lives.

On the one hand, I can understand that. We are not masochists. We do not go around looking for pain or being foolish about the reality of danger. However, neither should we make the avoidance of all grief a goal. Here Christ is making a very clear connection between being in the favor of God and mourning. Let's look at what he means by this.

B. What does it mean to mourn?

To mourn means to groan under the burden of guilt and sorrow.

There are two aspects to this:

1) Mourn over sin that I commit

Now, you can see why it is so important that we cultivate a fundamental sense of Godly humility. God is Creator. I am creation. God is infinitely pure. I am fundamentally sinful. God is the rightful ruler and has made the rules based upon his own character and being. When I rebel against his rules, I am defying his position and exalting myself over him. I reject his rules because I do not want to love him because I love myself. I reject his position because I want to pretend that I am god and that I can do whatever I want. I am prone to take credit for the very things that he provides. I am a glory thief, deserving of the wrath of God, yet God gives me air to breathe, strength to function, food to eat and a mind to think. When I begin to realize how much I live in hostility to God (Romans 8.7), and at the same time realize that he is not a tyrant, but a God who loves to be known by his mercy, I am overwhelmed, and I need to be overwhelmed. I need to be overwhelmed by my guilt. It is when I am overwhelmed by my guilt that I am ready to hear the good news of his redemption. I must mourn over my sin. Meaning: I must recognize my need for God's grace, in order to cry out for God's grace. I am not going to ask for something and bank my whole being upon it until I realize that I am in desperate need for it.

So, mourning over sin that I commit is what drives me to repentance and faith in Christ. But, it does not stop there. "Those who mourn" (present tense substantive participle) has the idea of something that continues. Please listen carefully, because this is easy to misunderstand. When we come to grips with the reality of our sin, and we turn to Christ and trust him, we are converted. We are saved. We are redeemed. We are born into the family of God. We become a new creation. The life that we now live as followers of Christ is marked by how we became followers of Christ.

I was grieved over the knowledge of my sin. I repented and believed in Christ and was in that moment, forgiven of my sin and declared righteous in the eyes of God. Just as I repented and believed and became a follower of Christ, I keep on repenting of my sin and believing Christ because I am a follower of Christ. Paul uses the

language of “put off” and “put on” to describe this. It is not behaviorism or legalism. It is the continual application of the gospel. Mourning over my sin is what drove me to Christ, and mourning over my sin keeps my heart tender and keeps me grateful for the gospel. I am not, in any way, suggesting that after you come to grips with your sin and you confess it to God, that you keep going back and picking the guilt up again and again. No! When you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Embrace that. Don’t go back and pick up yesterday’s sin that you dealt with, you’ve got enough already today to address – right?

That’s the point. Mourning over sin means to keep your heart tender to the inclinations of your heart to rebel against God, even as a believer. Mourning is a gift from God to help us understand his Heart and grieve as he does over my sin. Mourning over sin is both a fruit of humility and a means of cultivating humility. As we will see in a minute, mourning over sin is the means that God has established for our comfort, if (IF) we mourn with the cross in view. But this mourning is not just over our guilt

To mourn means to groan under the burden of guilt and sorrow.

We also...

2) Mourn over sin that affects me

When I was in the first grade I rode a bus to school. Jill rode the same bus and was in my class. She lived in a beautiful home on a wooded lot on a picturesque street. One night, Jill’s house caught on fire and she died. The next morning when we stood to repeat the pledge of allegiance, I couldn’t. I buried my head on my desk and cried. Jill’s desk was next to mine and it was empty. It is one of my earliest memories of loss and grief. It would not be the last. There is a burden; a groaning that comes from living in a sin-cursed world. There is a weight; a heaviness that presses upon our soul when we experience loss. This is a mourning that comes not primarily because of something that we have done, but the result of living in this world. It is the part that we do not like, and often do not want to discuss. But we cannot avoid it, and if we refuse to face it, we forfeit the comfort that is there for those who take the time to actually consider what has happened and choose to mourn. But I want you to note the relationship between mourning over my sin and mourning over the results of living in a sin-cursed world. If I am not mourning over my sin and daily recognizing what I have been saved from, then I will look at the sin around me (if it does not affect me) with condescension (or if it does affect me) with bitterness. Mourning is a gift from God to grieve as he does over sin. I need to cultivate an attitude of mourning over my sin in order to cultivate a spirit that is constantly surprised by grace. But, we have difficulty in doing that.

3) Our Difficulty in mourning

Mourning takes time, and we think that don't have time to mourn. Mourning is a bother. Mourning is an inconvenience. Mourning is a sign of weakness. We need to "move on" and get over it. Forget about it. Besides, other people don't like mourning, and are uncomfortable with us mourning and they expect us to "move on" with our grief, so, if we are taking our cues from our world, we learn to stuff it. Listen carefully, our culture does not help us with mourning, either over our sin (because we don't talk about sin as sin) or over the sorrow of our world (because we are so busy). I maintain that many of us are ridiculously busy and complicate our lives with things that are not important because it conveniently keeps us from dealing with the truly important issues of our hearts.

When is the most logical time that a person will mourn? Would it not be at the death of a family member? But, we don't have time. We have funeral arrangements to make. We have people to call. We have flowers to order. We have a service to plan. We have housing logistics, meal logistics for family and friends coming in. We have pictures to put together, a eulogy to write, a video to edit and songs to pick out. We have an outfit to purchase, papers to sign, forms to file and legal stuff to address. Who's got time to sit? Who has time to actually feel the loss of what was and grieve over the loss of what could have been? Who has time to be still before God when the phone is ringing and decisions have to be made? How are you doing? Well, I feel a little numb! Of course we feel numb. We feel numb, because we haven't taken the time to actually feel! And why not? Because many people do not want to mourn and we are rarely alone and quiet before God. But, if we do not mourn, we become less human. But, there are many distractions to mourning. We have entertainment, busyness, medication, alcohol, work, sleep, and other forms of escape. All of these distractions do not serve us well. Even when we watch the news or read of tragedies on the internet, we rarely take time to grieve with the tragedy. Perhaps it is because we have access to so much information that some of us think that we have to know all of that information. But do we really need to know all of this if we do not take time to really absorb it? I think that repeated exposure to tragedy without personally downloading the information and mourning over it, adds another calloused layer upon our hearts that separates us from our true selves.

4) *The difference between self-pity and godly grief*

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul failed to follow the clear instructions of God. When confronted by the prophet Samuel, Saul tried to blow it off as no big deal. Samuel told Saul that the kingdom had just been ripped out of his hands and given to another. At this point, Saul panics. He then says, *"I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD."* Now, at face value those words sound pretty good, don't they? But Samuel knows better, and then it becomes clear from the next thing that Saul says, is that he is simply using words that he thinks Samuel would want to hear because he is trying to save face before the people. Saul has some grief over his sin, but it is not over the true nature of his sin, but over the consequences of his sin.

King David, on the other hand was guilty of terrible crimes. And yet, when his sin was exposed, David was truly broken. There was no cover-up, no excuse-making and no saving-face. He mourned over his sin and he found comfort. Saul was deeply bothered that his sin caused more problems for his life, but his sin did not drive him to repentance. Self-pity is the anger and depression we experience from the consequences of our sin. Godly grief is the passionate grief that we experience that drives us to the cross. The cross is where we find our comfort.

2. **They shall be comforted** (4b)

A. **Because of Christ.**

Good grief is godly grief. It is the kind of mourning that drives us to find relief in Christ. The only true comfort that you can find from your mourning is the comfort that is found in Christ and that is because only Christ can actually deal with and take away your guilt. Nothing else can comfort. Other things may distract for a while, but they cannot deal with true guilt. Christ does not minimize our sin by telling us not to take ourselves so seriously. He knows that our sin is truly serious and he treats it as such. That is what gives the person who mourns comfort.

Several years ago I visited a man from our church who was in the hospital. I had known him for a while. He had built a successful business, lived in a nice home and by many accounts had a pleasant life. But that day he revealed something to me that had gnawed at him for years. During WWII he was in the Air Force and flew a bomber. If you flew 25 missions (and were still alive) you could go home with honor. He was on his 24th mission over Japan when his plane was shot up pretty badly. He was able to get his plane back to base, but his co-pilot was killed. He was so angered that he signed up for another 25 missions and then 25 more after that. He told me that as he dropped his payload of bombs on the cities, he would curse the people and hope that they would die. He was sure that many did. As he was being processed back into civilian life he spent some time at a base in California that had a POW camp for Japanese soldiers. Some of them he had a chance to meet. They told him that they did not want to be in this war. This was not their idea. They had wives, children, homes they wanted to return to. Immediately his heart was gripped. He had probably killed some of their families and he couldn't change it. What do you do with that? That day in the hospital he told me that story with a sense of terror. He was a dying man and in his mind he had blood on his hands. He told me that he couldn't justify his actions by claiming that he was just obeying orders. He was the one who signed up for the additional missions. He was the one who cursed the people as the bombs dropped. He said, "I am going to die and I am going to hell." Then he tucked up his knees and turned and faced the wall.

What do you say to a man who is being crushed by his sin? For a minute I did not say anything. Then I said, "Chuck, you are a big sinner, but Jesus is a bigger Savior than you are a sinner." It was like he got hit by lightning. And I think for the first time, he

really understood the full impact of the gospel. He sat up in bed and said, "That's it, isn't it? Jesus is a bigger Savior than I am a sinner."

A person, who is mourning over his sin, looks for a Savior because he has come to realize that he cannot save himself. The person, who looks for the Savior, will find the Savior. He will find Christ. And he will find in Christ, the only One who takes all of his sin. But what about the person who mourns over the presence of sin in this world? What about the person who is broadsided by tragedy and overwhelmed with grief? "They SHALL be comforted."

B. Because of glory.

Much has been made about the physical environment of heaven; beauty, health, fun, friends, etc. But those things will be in place because in the presence of God we will be free from sin. Sin is the reason for fear, guilt, separation, anxiety, discouragement, regret, tragedy and all of the things that rest on us like a fog. But, it is not just the sin that is in us that we will be free from. We will be free from the sin that is around us. One day, all of our reasons for fear, all of our insecurities, all of our anxiety will be gone. We will experience a relationship with God and others that is so perfect and so satisfying and never-ending, that we will experience a comfort, beyond all compare. It is ours in Christ. It is ours, forever. Mourning is the means that gets us to Christ and Christ is our comfort.

Conclusion

How do you cultivate a spirit that mourns over sin?

- 1) Ask God to convict you of your sin.
- 2) Be still before God and ask him to reveal your sin.
- 3) Confess your sin daily.
- 4) Confess your sin by name.
- 5) Confess your sin to others you have wronged.
- 6) Read the gospel accounts of the cross.

Your mourning over your sin enables you to experience the depth of God's grace. This is what deepens your love for God and expands your heart for him. When you have been broadsided by tragedy and you feel crushed by grief, remember the promise of your Redeemer. Mourning will not win. Grief will not be triumphant. The sufferings of this present time are real. They are deep. They can cause us to be gripped by panic and paralyzed with fear. But, these are the sufferings of the present time and that's it (Romans 8.18). The sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. This does not minimize our present sufferings; it only magnifies the glory that will be revealed and the comfort that we will experience.