

Sermon Title: "Those Who Mourn"

Prelude

UMH #298 "When I Survey the Wonderous Cross"

Congregational Reading: UMH #205 "Canticle of Light and Darkness"

Apostle's Creed UMH #881

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-4

Isaiah 61:1-3

Revelation 7:9-17

Sermon: "Those Who Mourn"

Lord's Prayer

UMH #512 "Stand By Me"

Closing Prayer and Benediction: Number 6:24-26

Postlude

Memory Verse: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Monthly Challenge: Your challenge this month is to read through the Gospel of Matthew.

“Those Who Mourn”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

2/24/2021

Opening Prayer

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Here we are in now our second week of Lent, the most somber of seasons for the Christian, and appropriately we are looking at one of the most wonderful pronouncements Jesus ever made. The word mourning probably conjures up all kinds of thoughts for you. Funerals, great trials past and present, major losses in relationships, etc. We mourn in this life about much don’t we? We mourn for our individual pains when we are bereaved with grief. We mourn for our community, for our country, for our world in the direction they seem to be headed and for the great tragedies that strike. We mourn for our church, both local and universal, that ebbs and flows, and where often we see horrific theology and hypocrisy. There is much to mourn, Beloved. But we are blessed to mourn if we mourn rightly, because Christ promises comfort.

It is important that we remember the context of these words Jesus preaches. He has just taken up His ministry in Galilee at this point, He has just started doing great miracles after being Baptized and walking in the desert, and here in the Beatitudes we get the start of His greatest common preaching message known as the Sermon on the Mount. He preaches in the place from chapters 5-7. He touches on all kinds of important things such as marriage, the reality of eternal life or damnation, anxiety, help for the poor, personal relationships, and being outwardly visibly Godly. But the beginning of this great message, one of the biggest that He will give to thousands of people, are the Beatitudes. Eight or nine blessings (depending on how you categorize them) that are really more akin to commandments on what the life of a follower of God looks like. On Sunday we looked at how we are blessed if we are poor (or humble/gentle/etc.) in the spirit. Humility makes sense to us in the life of a believer, but here we are called blessed if we mourn, for then we shall be comforted. In some ways this doesn’t make sense to us.

Blessed are we if we mourn? For then we shall be comforted? I would assume most all of us would rather not to have to mourn, but rather just be comforted. In our second reading from the book of Isaiah 61:1-3 we read about a Messianic prophecy concerning Jesus. He said “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” It is very clear that the ministry of Jesus, His life and death and resurrection, are a comfort to us who are brokenhearted and are captive and are afflicted. It is clear that He

This is certainly good news, that we who mourn will be comforted, but it still begs the question about why mourning is even included. We hate to mourn, why is it here? There is a hint about this in our third reading from Revelation. “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” Skipping ahead to verses 14-17 “I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.’” Again, it is very clear that God will make things right in the end, that in His time His people will enter into eternal rest with no more suffering. It is very clear that Christ will comfort us who mourn... but using this group that is mentioned in Revelation seven, we can again see that this comfort comes on the other side of great mourning. These people go through the Great Tribulation, which certainly means persecution and death at the hands of the evil one. Beloved, although we would much prefer to not mourn in this life, the reality is that mourning exists... and that it serves a purpose in pushing us towards Christ.

Lets be honest for a moment. Difficulty in our lives produces desire doesn't it? When you are stressed, in pain, and especially when you are in mourning there is a deep desire to be comforted. There is a need for it. In our earthly mourning we will turn to many things. A loved one perishes, and so we overeat or workout excessively for example. Or we go through a bad breakup, or a divorce, or we lose a friend, and we try to comfort ourselves through our hobbies or extra work, or in accomplishing something. We need comfort when we face distress. We need comfort when we mourn. Comfort alone produces no change, and perhaps most alarmingly, great comfort and pleasure tends to produce a lazy and unsympathetic and unchanging person. We understand more when we mourn, we grow when we are in trial, we appreciate relief when it comes on the other side of our difficulties. Relating this to the Gospel, relating this in particular to what Jesus is getting at, this isn't just physical and emotional comfort Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5:4. This is more importantly about being comforted from the mourning that accompanies our sin. In other words, this is about mourning that produces salvation.

Here are a couple examples of folks who mourn in scripture, not about the things of this world, but about their sin. Notice how God deals with them. Ahab, an evil king of Israel is mentioned in 1st Kings 21:25-29. “Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the sons of Israel. It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.’” Another would be the criminal on the cross next to Christ in Luke 23:41-43 “‘And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” I’ll give you one more, this comes from the book of Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah. Lamentations chapter three contains some messages of both mourning and hope. 3:1 “I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath.” 3:21-22 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail.” 3:49 “My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping.” 3:57-58 “You drew near when I called on You; You said, ‘Do not fear!’ O Lord, You have pleaded my soul’s cause; You have redeemed my life.” We could go on with many more examples, but you get the idea.

Those three examples, an evil king, a wicked criminal, and a righteous prophet all have three things in common Beloved. The first is that they were great transgressors who were condemned. Ahab was led into great sin by his wife Jezebel that crippled his kingdom, and the pronouncement from God was he was to be destroyed. The criminal was rightly being put to death for his own self-admitted wrongs, with no hope of salvation to come. Even Jeremiah, a righteous prophet, admits that his nation (including himself) was being destroyed by God’s righteous judgement. All three, beyond being condemned, secondly mourned. Ahab and the criminal mourned the sin in their own lives, and they mourned that they were going to be destroyed rightly. Jeremiah mourned that his people were put into captivity, had a heavy yoke placed upon them, and that they had become desolate rightly. The third thing that all three of these people saw, and this is important, is that God’s mercy in their humility was great. They were all comforted in their right mourning. God relented on punishing Ahab in his time because he turned back. Jesus proclaimed salvation for the criminal because the man turned to Him. Jeremiah found comfort in knowing that God’s mercy and grace and lovingkindness were unfailing, and in time his people did return home. Beloved, we hate to mourn, but it is in our mourning that we are redeemed.

To connect the dots for us today, we would do well to learn to mourn the evil in our own lives and the evil in our world that plagues us. Ahab would never have been spared if he did not mourn his own evil ways and humble himself in front of the Lord. The criminal on the cross would not have received eternal life if he had not mourned his own sins and called upon Jesus for salvation. The nation of Israel that Jeremiah spoke for would not have been redeemed and returned home if they had not first mourned their own evil actions. Beloved, if we do not mourn our own sin, our own evil, what hope do we have? We have to mourn the sin that plagues us, the evil that surrounds us, and in so doing we bring it to God because there we find comfort. There is a reason we mourn, Beloved, and there is a purpose in it. We mourn because it prompts us to return to the Lord and find our comfort in the only place that lasts. Chocolate may bring you relief for a moment, a vacation may do so for a week, and a new truck or boat or other toy may do so for a month, but true comfort in our mourning is only found in God's saving love. That is what Jesus came to do as proclaimed in Isaiah 63. That true comfort is explained in Revelation, and is where we find our eternal hope. But if we don't mourn our evil, if we do not mourn the world's evil towards God, then we will not come to Him for comfort... and that is to invite destruction and damnation. As Jesus told us in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Beloved, Blessed are you if you mourn the evil in your life and in this world. If you do not mourn your sins, if you do not care when God's love towards you is trampled upon, then you are in great danger. Beloved, as we close in prayer and leave here this Wednesday, lets honestly examine ourselves and act appropriately as Christ has called us to do. Let us pray,

Closing Prayer