

## Getting to the end of ourselves: Mourn to be Happy

In the lesson two weeks ago I introduced the idea of getting to the end of ourselves. The reason for doing this is because this is how we experience real blessings & fulfillment in this life.

**Luke 9:23-24** Jesus instructed some disciples that we must deny ourselves in order that our lives may be saved. The main focus of our lives must be on spiritual things instead of physical things. As a friend of mine has said, we need to live our lives wearing “spiritual goggles”. I think this fits well with the teaching of the prophet Isaiah in **Isa.55**.

- Vs.1-2a Physical things fail, so don't set your sights on those things
- Vs.2b-3 God invites us to listen to Him & eat spiritual food to live
- Vs.6-7 We're all in the same condition when we rely on ourselves
  - –wicked, unrighteous
- Vs.8-9 The ways & thoughts of God are so much better than ours
- Vs.10-11 Everything that God intends to do He accomplishes, which is proof that we should live our lives listening to Him and doing His will instead of our own

We don't want to be like the Jews in **Jn 6** who were essentially eating manna in the wilderness to die. Jesus was teaching them to eat the bread from Heaven to live.

Recognize that this perspective about life is not only countercultural, it is also counterintuitive.

Beginning with the lesson last week we started exploring how **Jesus wants to lead us down the path to real life**. He doesn't want us to call Him Lord, Lord and not do what He says (Lk6:46). He wants us to build our lives with Him as the solid foundation because this is the path leading to real blessings & fulfillment.

To get to this abundant life we must get to the end of ourselves.

**In order to get to the end of ourselves & become useful to God we must see our own brokenness.**

This is what Jesus was teaching when He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt.5:3

Admitting that you are bankrupt and have nothing to offer to redeem yourself from sin is what it means to be poor in spirit.

**The paradox is that brokenness is the way to wholeness.**

Let’s move forward to further explore how Jesus wants to lead us down the path to real life. He teaches us with another paradox, but let me preface it by asking you to recall a time in your life when things were going really well and suddenly things changed. The rug was pulled out from under your feet. Or you were punched in the gut and couldn’t breathe.

Maybe the person you thought you would marry told you that things just weren’t going to work out.

Maybe it was your spouse telling you he/she wants a divorce.

Maybe you get a phone call saying there’s been a terrible accident involving a loved one.

Maybe the doctor gives you some bad news about your health.

Maybe your employer closes their doors and you lose your job.

It could be a thousand other things, but the point is life was going along smoothly and then you suffered a painful loss. **It has been said, “If you’re going to live, you’re going to lose”.**

The well-known author Ernest Hemingway is said to have been challenged by a group of his peers over lunch. They bet him ten dollars that he couldn’t come up with a short story only six words long. Hemingway took that bet, pulled out a napkin, and wrote the following story:

“For sale, baby shoes, never worn.”

There is a powerful message in those six words. It appears to tell a tragic story of the birth of a baby who died before ever reaching the age to wear shoes.

Each one of us could write a heartbreaking story in only six words. What would your story be?

- I didn't mean to hurt anybody.
- My addiction is out of control.
- I'm leaving. The marriage is over.

The commonality to all of these situations is that when they happen we come quickly to the end of ourselves and recognize what little power we have to control things in life.

In such times Jesus offers another paradox.

**"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matt.5:4**

We generally say that in this scripture Jesus is teaching us that we need to mourn over our sin. And while that may be the primary focus, I want us to consider it from a different perspective first.

Speaking on the word "mourn" in this passage, the commentator William Barclay writes: "The Greek word for mourn used here is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language... it is defined as the kind of grief which takes such a hold that it cannot be hidden. It is not only sorrow which brings an ache to the heart; it is the sorrow which brings the unrestrainable tears to the eyes."

We ask ourselves where is the blessing in mourning? Because from our worldly perspective we think we are blessed when everything goes our way, or when all our dreams come true. A blessed life, as any normal person would define it, would be a life free from mourning, not marked by it.

**Yet, Jesus says that when life gets extremely difficult, when we experience the deepest suffering we've ever encountered, when we come to the end of ourselves –then we are blessed.**

How can what Jesus said be true? It seems completely backwards. What Jesus said is true because blessing isn't dependent on what happens on the outside. It comes from the inside.

Suffering gives us the experience to know the blessing of God's comfort. Without suffering we know very little about God's comfort.

Consider Job. He was living what we would consider a blessed life. He was healthy, happily married, blessed with ten children, 11,000 livestock, and said to be the "greatest of all the people of the East." (Job 1:1-3)

Then Satan comes on the scene and begins to afflict Job in ways that he thought would cause Job to rebel against God. But to his surprise Job grew closer to God.

"My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen you." Job 42:5

Apparently Job didn't know much about God's comfort until he experienced suffering.

So, here is what we find in our suffering. At the end of yourself, you have an opportunity to experience the presence of God in a way you never have before.

This isn't our normal mode of operation in suffering. We tend to do everything we can to stay away from suffering in the first place. But when we do suffer, we do everything we can to stay away from mourning. And when we catch ourselves mourning, we do everything in our power to make it go away.

It's human nature to avoid suffering and when it comes our way we can't seem to focus on anything but the suffering. When Jesus says blessed are those who mourn, He isn't recommending that we go looking for trouble. But what He is saying is that when trouble comes we can find an incredible blessing in the pain and darkness.

The apostle Paul teaches us about the perspective we should have about suffering.

#### 2 Cor.12:7-10

- When Paul faced affliction from this "thorn in the flesh", he saw it as a hindrance. It caused him pain and he prayed to God to remove it from him.
- He thought he was more useful to God without it, but God convinced him the real power was not from his own strength.

- When Paul understood that his success in life was determined by his relationship with God, he surrendered his thinking to God
- He learned what Jesus meant when He said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”
  - True blessing doesn’t depend on our circumstances, so Paul could truly say when I am weak, then I am strong.

### 2 Cor.1:3-4

- God is the Father of mercies and all comfort. He comforts us in all our tribulation. Remember, if we have no suffering we don’t experience the comfort of God.
- By our own experiences we are able to comfort each other.

Everyone experiences loss and everyone mourns, but those who follow Jesus have the opportunity to grow closer to God and know the blessing of God’s comfort, which leads to peace that surpasses human understanding (Phil.4:7).

Now let’s consider this idea of mourning from this text in the traditional way – mourning over our sin.

Throughout Scripture there is a connection between mourning over sin and receiving God’s blessing. Let me call your attention to a particular example of this in the OT in the life of King David.

You remember that he had an affair with Bathsheba and in time his sin was known and everything came crashing down on him. At that time David was distraught. In Psalm 32 David writes about this time in his life.

Psa.32:1-2 appears to have been **AFTER** he repented of his sin.

Psa.32:3-4 appears to have been **BEFORE** he repented of his sin.

Can you see the stark difference? This is teaching us that if we fail to acknowledge our sin, there can be no mourning. And without mourning there can be no repentance. And without repentance we miss the comfort that comes from the blessing of God’s forgiveness and grace.

Around 1,600 years ago, Augustine wrote in his work titled "Confessions", "My sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner."

I suppose denial is human nature. But the problem with denial is that although we can appear to be unaffected by our sin on the outside, it produces turmoil on the inside (Psa.32:4).

Denial seems like a good idea at the time, but it is like an anchor that keeps us tied to sin. Because there is difficulty and pain in repentance we are often content to stay on the path of least resistance.

David is teaching us that if we don't confess our sin and repent we cannot experience the comfort that comes from the forgiveness of God (Psa.32:5).

**Psa.32:9** Don't be like the horse or mule that has to be harnessed and forced to go in the right direction.

**Psa.32:10-11** Trust in the Lord and He will show mercy to you that causes you to rejoice.

Jesus said it this way:

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

James expresses it this way: **James 4:8-10**

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up".