

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 29 Aug 2021

Sermon Title : Mourn

Speaker : Rev Shannon Chan

Text : Matthew 5:4

INTRODUCTION

The context to the 'Sermon of the Mount' is painted in Matthew 3:2 when John the Baptist declares that the Kingdom of Heaven is "on hand, at hand or has come near us". However it is only to those who respond to Him that Jesus who is the "Kingdom Among Us", teaches about the availability of the Kingdom of Heaven and makes available this Kingdom of Heaven to us. We heard in last week's sermon that the Kingdom of Heaven is available to the "spiritually bankrupt" or "spiritual zeros" who enjoy heaven's care. (Matthew 5:3) It is important to note that 'The Beatitudes' are recorded in both the gospels of Matthew and Luke but they present this sermon from different perspectives:

- In Matthew – Jesus is seen seated on a mountainside portrayed as the King speaking down to the people about His Kingdom.
- In Luke – Jesus stands on the plain, amidst the oppression and mess of this world, and mingles with the suffering masses, longing to introduce them to His Kingdom which brings healing to the broken.

Both perspectives are needed to present a more complete understanding of Jesus and His message – they show us that 'The Beatitudes' are for all of broken humanity and not just the spiritual elite.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4 ESV)

The definition of mourning is - to sorrow, to weep, to lament. This may sound contradictory or unappealing - How is someone blessed when they are lamenting? Can those who mourn/weep actually be happy?

In this verse, Jesus uses the word "Blessed" (Makarios) which refers not just to those who are happy, but refers to the highest type of well-being possible, because God's sufficiency meets them in their appalling need. However, to better understand what mourning is, we need to consider what mourning is not.

What Mourning is not:

- Whining about adverse circumstances that are not according to our liking or comfort level, for example, not being able to go for vacation overseas, dislike wearing face masks or unable to sing or mingle in church due to the pandemic.

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

- A psychological disposition, mood, or melancholic tendency.
- The kinds of mourning that God does not bless.
Some examples include the following:
 - Owners of food and beverage outlets who mourn because they are shut down for not following safe management regulations set by the government.
 - Criminals who are caught and mourn their arrest.
 - Corrupt or oppressive politicians who mourn their loss of power.
 - Individuals who mourn about the consequences of self-inflicted wounds on self-inflated egos.

It is important to remember that God does not give a blanket promise to comfort every one for every reason.

What Mourning is:

a. True mourning includes the “weeping ones”.

Luke refers to those who mourn as the ‘weeping ones’. (Luke 6:21) Dallas Willard suggests that the weeping ones include those whose spouses have deserted or rejected them, parents who are grieving the death of a child or of a prodigal child, people who have lost their businesses, life savings and employment because of an economic downturn.

God’s blessing is available for the weeping ones who mourn, but as the weeping ones see the Kingdom of God, and live in it, God promises that our tears will be turned to laughter.

b. True mourning includes mourning for others.

The prophet Isaiah is an example of what it means to mourn for others:

- He saw that not only he but the people of Israel too had dirty lips and hearts that were ungodly and far from God.
- He witnessed the idolatry and social evils committed by God’s people and it deeply distressed him.
- He witnessed how low the nation of Israel had fallen and what seemed to be irreparable damage, and he mourned for his people with a heart filled with Godly sorrow.

Jesus Himself also lamented and wept for the city of Jerusalem and its coming destruction. (Luke 19:41-44) It is such mourning that will result in blessedness. The Psalmist says that those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy (Psalm 126:5-6). Do we sorrow over seeing the effects of sin on families, societies, and nations?

If we seek revival in the times that we live in, it needs to start with the church rediscovering biblical mourning.

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

True revivals in Christian history were often connected with personal and collective mourning as a result of the faithful preaching of God's Word. Positive vibes associated with feel good worship services ("happy clappy songs") may distract us from looking deeply within to explore the sins/issues in our inner lives/hearts and prevent us from embracing true mourning. As we examine our lives, do we find ourselves looking for shortcuts in our Christian life; looking to find joy without sorrow, to experience blessedness without brokenness, laughter without tears, celebration without repentance and glory without grief? Such shortcuts may lead to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would call cheap grace or cheap discipleship.

To reverse this trend of short cuts, we need to consider a liturgical reform – to place emphasis on self-examination, confession of sin, and repentance. We need to have the kind of worship that brings to light God's awesome presence so we realize our stubborn sinfulness and carelessness. We need to bring back hymns and songs that help us to do this instead of drowning ourselves with sentimental love songs that cover God with a false and presumptuous familiarity. If we do not take corrective action, we will be victims of a false spirituality and our programs of service to the community will be programs more to meet our own needs instead of being driven by the mourning for our world.

c. True mourning includes mourning for self

A means to do this is the practice of *examen*. We need to regularly examine ourselves to surface the bad stuff hidden within. It is the spiritual examination of our soul through:

- Our Consciousness of God – To reflect prayerfully on our feelings, thoughts and actions considering how God has been present and active in our day, and how we have responded to His presence.
- Our Conscience before God – To ask God to search our hearts to the depths – to ask to see what is truly in us – the points of sinful brokenness deep within.
- Pray for heart sorrow and a holy mourning that leads to true repentance.

Even the great evangelist John Sung, despite having brought thousands to Christ and impacted many Christian leaders, admitted that he was guilty of serious offenses against God and fellow missionaries. He lamented and wept tears of repentance. He believed that his severe illness was the result of God's discipline. Indeed he was a man so sensitized to know of his deep personal sins and to mourn them.

Those who truly mourn will find God's comfort.

"Therefore Christ does not wish that there should be nothing but mourning or sadness here but warns against those who will not mourn at all. He wants to teach His Christians, if it goes badly with them and they have to mourn, that they may know that this is God's good pleasure, and it should also be theirs, and that they should not swear, or rage or despair, as though God had no mercy." (Martin Luther)

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

CONCLUSION

Let us mourn not just in suffering but also for our sins and those of others. May our hearts break in the same way as Isaiah's when we see the sins of society and the world. May we also humble ourselves before God in self-examination, confess and repent of our personal sins, so we may experience the forgiveness of God and the full knowledge of what it means to live in the cross and experience its comfort.

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

A. Review Sermon Content

Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.

Appoint someone to read Matthew 5:4 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, 'This is the Word of the Lord.'

All to respond, "Thanks be to God." Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now."

- a. As God's word was read, how has this verse spoken to you?

- b. (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon "Mourn"?

- (ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 2a. Why is it important to remember that God does not give a blanket promise to comfort every one for every reason?
- 2b. How has knowing true mourning includes mourning for others and self in the practice of self-examination impacted your understanding of mourning?
- 2c. Have you mourned for others recently?
 - (i) If yes, what was it about?
 - (ii) If no, what has prevented you from doing so?
- 3a. Do you find mourning for yourself through self-examination challenging? Why?
- 3b. What is one thing you can change in your life so that you may regularly practise self-examination and mourn for yourself in true repentance?
- 3c. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 3b above, for the following week(s) till your next meeting?

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

4. Share your testimony on how you experienced God's comfort in a time of mourning.

OR

Give thanks to God for His promise that those who sow in tears will reap songs of joy.

5. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared in 3b and 3c to God, asking for the Holy Spirit's revelation on areas in your life where you may need to mourn in repentance.

As a group, pray for your group and our church to have hearts that will break for things that break God's heart, and mourn for the sins of others, society and the world and hold firm to the promise that those who mourn will receive God's comfort and reap songs of joy.

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