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Sermon Summary #2

What's So Blessed about Mourning and Meekness? Matthew 5:1-12

Let's be honest. At least when you first hear it, being mournful and meek doesn't sound all that appealing. Why would Jesus pronounce as blessed those who mourn and those who are meek? I mentioned in our first week in the Beatitudes how contrary these principles are to the ways and the values of the world around us. And there is no better example of this than what we see here in Matthew 5:4-5. The world, generally speaking, despises those who mourn. Being perpetually upbeat, chipper, casual, and overflowing with laughter even in the face of horrendous evil is prized by the world. And being meek is almost a surefire way of being trampled upon and mocked in today's dog-eat-dog society.

So what in the world does Jesus mean when he declares "blessed" those who "mourn" and those who are "meek"?

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

This may well be the most difficult beatitude to understand because we know that Scripture exhorts us repeatedly to rejoice. In fact, Paul tells us to **rejoice always** (1 Thess. 5:16)! Peter says we are filled with "joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). So, you are probably like me in asking, "How can I obey Paul and Peter at the same time I obey Jesus? How can I always rejoice when Jesus blesses those who mourn?" If that isn't enough to make you scratch your head in confusion, just look down to v. 12 of Matthew 5 where Jesus commands us to "rejoice and be glad"! Is he contradicting himself?

The answer to this predicament isn't all that difficult. Once we understand what it means to mourn and when it is appropriate and what it means to rejoice and when it is appropriate, we will see that, believe it or not, **both emotions can exist simultaneously in the Christian heart**. In 2 Corinthians 6:8b-10 Paul describes his experience as an apostle. Look closely at what he says:

"We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; **as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:8b-10).

Now, note well that these are not sequential experiences. It isn't as if Paul is saying, for example, that after we no longer are treated as impostors, people will acknowledge us as true. He is saying that all of these occur at the same time. And that applies especially to the statement, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Rejoicing doesn't merely come after sorrow has passed. If it did, Paul wouldn't have said he "always" rejoices. He is telling us in no uncertain terms that **his sorrow and joy are simultaneous affections**. Neither one is precluded by the other. It is as if Paul had said, "I am always sorrowful at the same time that I am always rejoicing."

There are circumstances that call for mourning, at the same time we can rejoice in the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. There are situations and experiences that provoke deep and heart-broken sadness at the same time we know that when Christ returns and inaugurates the new heaven and new earth, "He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

So, let's be perfectly clear about what Jesus does **not** mean by this.

- He does not mean that we are to be perpetually morose, always weeping. Jesus is not speaking of the person who is naturally melancholy, walks slightly slumped over and mumbles his words.
- This is not that sort of mourning which is the fruit of self-pity, as when people weep because of dissatisfaction with their job, appearance, or lot in life.

- This mourning is not the product of outward loss, whether material or relational in nature.
- Some people mourn when they can't satisfy their lust or when they mourn the absence of some possession they covet.
- Neither is this despair. Judas Iscariot recognized his sin, was sorry, made confession and restitution, yet did not "mourn" as Jesus had in mind. There is a difference between such "despair" and spiritual "mourning." The former does not look to Christ but to self.
- This is not the sort of mourning that laments the consequences more than the crime, the sentence more than the sin.

Here is what Jesus had in mind.

- This is the spiritual counterpart to poverty of spirit. "It is one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it; it is another to grieve and to mourn over it. Or, . . . confession is one thing, contrition is another" (Stott, 41). We must do more than acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy; we must agonize over it.
- This is not the sorrow of bereavement, but of *repentance*. It is personal grief over personal sin (cf. Isa. 6:5; Rom. 7:24). It is grief for particular sins, not simply sin in general. When a man is sick, he does not say to the doctor: "I don't feel well" and leave it at that. He points to his wound and specifies his pain. Speaking of sins in general can easily become a cover for denying sins in particular. And it is here that again we see how we can mourn and rejoice simultaneously. I mourn that I am a selfish sinner and that I have dishonored God in so many ways. But I rejoice at the same time because I know I am forgiven and redeemed and will live in God's presence forever.
- This is also sorrow over the sins of others. "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law" (Ps. 119:136). Do you share Paul's sentiment when he says: "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18)? Do we mourn over the loss of truth, integrity, and decency in our society? In our churches?
- James writes, "Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and he will exalt you" (4:9-10). This is not an indictment of joy or a demand for perpetual sadness. The context of James 4 indicates that he is addressing people who had become flippant, casual, and indifferent toward sin because of their "love affair" with the world. This, then, is a call for sober repentance. His point here is simply that *sin is no laughing matter*. Rejoice in holiness. Find in Christ and his beauty a reason for joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8). But don't delight in your worldliness. Some of you who are calloused and careless about your sin need to mourn and weep and exchange your laughter for heartfelt repentance. But others of you who are burdened by your guilt and saddened by your failures need to rejoice with joy inexpressible that your sins are forgiven! So, James is not condemning all laughter, but thoughtless, hard-hearted laughter that makes light of sin.

I must confess that I find myself in a state of mourning right now, in the midst of this Covid-19 crisis and social and racial unrest. I'm mourning the petty divisions that Satan is using to keep people at each other's throats. I'm mourning the heightened racial animosity that threatens to unravel our society. I'm mourning that our brothers and sisters of color, minorities of every ethnicity, feel unwelcome, unvalued, and unsafe. I'm mourning that our faithful police officers likewise feel unappreciated and misunderstood. I'm mourning that we can't meet in healthy conditions so that all are safe and comfortable here.

And I trust that God will truly honor his promise that I will be comforted, to some degree now, in this life, but in ways that I can't even begin to imagine in the age to come. When Jesus walked into the synagogue and took the scroll of Isaiah, he turned to chapter 61 where we find this description of his purpose for coming into this world:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of

our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified” (Isa. 61:1-3).

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”

There is considerable misunderstanding when it comes to the meaning of meekness or humility. Bobby Knight, former boisterous basketball coach at Indiana University, once said: “The meek may well inherit the earth, but they rarely get rebounds!” This comment reveals the common misconception of meekness: that it entails indolence, laziness, weakness of heart, a sort of mental and emotional flabbiness, perhaps a fear of expressing oneself forcefully, lack of aggression, a tendency to compromise when the truth is at stake. Others would identify meekness with a docile, dependent personality. No. So, what is meekness?

- Although meekness is not weakness, let us not lose sight of an essential element: **tenderness and sensitivity**, a capacity to deal gently and compassionately with others.
- An essential element in meekness is **the willingness to allow others to say about me in public the same things I readily acknowledge before God in private.**
- The meek person is not easily provoked: “Those who seek my life lay snares for me; and those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction, and they devise treachery all day long. But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a dumb man who does not open his mouth” (Ps. 38:12-13).
- Meekness is the antithesis of hastiness, malice, revenge.
- Meekness is living in accordance with the abilities God has given us, neither as if we had more nor less; neither pressing ourselves into situations we are not equipped to handle (for fear that if we don’t, people will lose respect for us), nor shying away from those we can.
- The key to meekness/humility is a healthy acknowledgement of and submission to the sovereign grace of God. In 1 Cor. 4:7, Paul writes: “For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” Meekness should always be in direct proportion to one’s grasp of grace. Pride is the fruit of the lie that what I have I didn’t receive. Meekness or humility is the fruit of the truth that everything is of God. See also John 3:22-30, esp. vv. 27 and 30.

One thing that will help us understand “meekness” is Psalm 37:11, the OT text that Jesus is almost certainly quoting here.

“But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace” (Ps. 37:11).

Two verses earlier in Psalm 37, we read that “those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land” (Ps. 37:9b). Meekness, then, is waiting on the Lord. If we ask what it means to “wait” for the Lord, the preceding verses in Psalm 37 tell us:

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the

light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil” (Psalm 37:5-8).

Meek people “commit” their lives to the Lord every step of the way, never claiming that they are self-made or sufficient to make things work on their own. They trust in him and his goodness. Have you ever wondered why the Bible describes Moses as “very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3)? It is because when Miriam and Aaron protested his marrying a Cushite woman and claimed that they heard from God as clearly as he did, Moses didn’t defend himself. He trusted in God and waited for God to vindicate him, which is precisely what happened. *Meek people are not self-defensive.*

Meek people are “still” before the Lord and “wait patiently” for him. Meek people don’t “fret” over the prosperity of others. In other words, they are not envious. Meek people “refrain from anger and forsake wrath.” In other words, the meek don’t have a short temper. By God’s grace they keep their anger under control. Here’s how John Piper put it:

“[Being meek] doesn’t mean they become lazy. It means that they’re free of frenzy. They have a kind of steady calm that comes from knowing that God is omnipotent, that he has their affairs under his control, and that he is gracious and will work things out for the best. Meek people have a quiet steadiness about their lives in the midst of upheaval.”

Yet another characteristic of the meek is that they are teachable. Arrogant and prideful people are convinced they already know it all. They bristle and fume when anyone dares to teach them something or to correct some false belief they might have. Here is how James put it:

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

To be meek means you receive the word of God. You aren’t defiant or resistant and don’t get angry when shown from Scripture that your thoughts are in error. But that doesn’t mean you don’t stand up for your convictions. Meekness does not mean you are mealy-mouthed when it comes to biblical truth. Meekness doesn’t mean you compromise your theology just to avoid an argument. It simply means you argue humbly and quietly and with love for the person with whom you disagree.

Pride: the moral antithesis of Meekness

Perhaps the best way to understand why meekness is so important is to consider the horribly destructive and God-dishonoring nature of pride. Pride is the antithesis of meekness. It is its mortal enemy.

The first thing, indeed the most important thing, that we need to understand about pride is that **God hates it!** Lest you think that's too harsh and that I should soften my language, consider these texts:

“There are six things that the Lord **hates**, seven that are an **abomination** to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers” (Prov. 6:16-19).

“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an **abomination** to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished” (Prov. 16:5; observe that it is not merely the arrogance itself that is an abomination to the Lord; the arrogant *person* also is).

Of all that God hates, of all that is an abomination to him, what is first on the list? *Haughty* eyes, which is to say, prideful, arrogant eyes! “Haughty” eyes does not refer to how a person's eyes look to others but how a person himself sees or views himself and everyone else. He views them as less than himself, as essentially worthless. He is arrogant and puffed up with his own sense of value.

The word “**hate**” is an unpleasant one that we typically instruct our children to avoid. It's vicious, venomous, and destructive. Now imagine “hatred” in the heart of God, intensified and multiplied countless times over. We are talking about **righteous hatred, pure, unalloyed, unmitigated disgust and revulsion**. That's pretty potent, to say the least. Likewise, for something to be an “abomination” to God means that it is a stench in his nostrils; it is utterly repulsive and altogether putrid in his sight.

Is it any wonder, then, that we read in **James 4:6** – “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”? Think about that word “opposes”. James doesn't say that God simply ignores the proud or avoids them or keeps his distance from them. No, he resists them. **He works in open opposition to them. He wages war against them and thwarts them.** Pride or arrogance is something that provokes God to righteous indignation; it irritates him, agitates him, and displeases him beyond words.

We also see in Scripture that pride is a *precursor* to all other forms of sin. That is to say, **pride is the soil in which all manner of sin germinates and grows**. Consider these statements:

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:18-19).

“Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor” (Prov. 18:12; see also Prov. 21:4; 29:23).

Is it an exaggeration to say that pride is the underlying cause of all sin? No, I don't think so. If you would take the time to excavate your sin, beneath it all you would discover the rotting bones of pride and arrogance. Consider this.

Envy – Envy is the resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, an advantage that you are convinced ought rightfully to be yours. But why should someone else's success or promotion or praise provoke envy in our hearts? Why not joy, instead? The answer is because we don't want others to appear better than ourselves; we are convinced that we are more worthy and more deserving of the advantage than they are. That, dear friend, is pride!

Bitterness – Bitterness is that sour feeling in our souls when someone has offended us or defrauded us or failed to deliver on what we thought they owed us. But why should that provoke bitterness? Again, because it makes us look bad in the eyes of others or it deprives us of something we think we deserve. Again, this is pride!

Strife – Strife flows out of a competitive desire to be number one, the desire to be acknowledged by others, the desire for power and authority and praise. And where might that come from? Pride!

Deceit – Why do we lie and mislead others and speak in fuzzy rather than forthright terms? Almost always it is because we hope to gain something for ourselves that we think we deserve, or we do it to hide something from

others that we fear might make us look bad. Why? Pride!

Hypocrisy – Again, we are motivated to pretend to be something we *aren't* because we fear being seen and known for what we really *are*. Why? Because of pride!

Slander – Why do we speak badly of others? Why do we slander them? Probably because we've been hurt ourselves, and we want revenge; or we want to gain acceptance with others and the only way is to diminish them in the minds of those people whose favor or respect we desperately long for. Again, all this is driven by pride!

Greed – Greed at its core is the desire to make more of and for ourselves than God wishes or permits. And pride is the poker that stokes the fires of materialism. We can't stand the thought of people thinking that we aren't as rich and successful and talented and deserving and sophisticated as others are. Why? Pride!

I could go on endlessly, citing virtually every sin in the human soul, and at the bottom of each and every one lurks pride. Pride is quite simply ***that ugly part of your heart that causes you to be more concerned about yourself and your own reputation than you are about Christ and his.***

If there is any lingering doubt about the poisonous effect of pride in the soul of man, consider:

- Pride is the reason men why some men are afraid to be sensitive and gentle in relating to their wives.
- Pride is the reason why they won't say "I'm sorry, please forgive me," when they are in the wrong.
- Pride is the reason why some women shop endlessly lest they appear less fashionable than others.
- Pride is the reason some mothers push their children beyond what is healthy, hoping they will succeed and show themselves better and more successful than the children of their neighbors.
- Pride is the reason why men won't seek counseling or help when their marriages are in ruins. They can't bear the thought that others might think of them as inadequate to fix the problem themselves.
- Pride is the reason why some businessmen won't carry their witness for Christ to the office.
- Pride is the reason why other men won't serve in a visible capacity in the church.
- Pride is the reason why some refuse to submit to the authority of God's Word.
- Pride is the reason why you respond angrily when your child's grades are lower than the grades of the kids of your chief competitor; pride is the reason you are ashamed of your kids because they don't keep up with the Jones's kids.
- Pride is often the reason why men in particular won't carry a Bible to church. That's right. It's not because they say to themselves: "I don't need to bring a Bible. The pastor will project the verses on the screen." No, it's because in their pride they don't want others to think they are spiritually sensitive or that their Christianity is *too* important. For some, pride is what accounts for the desire to be seen in church; after all, that's what all good Americans do on Sunday; but they don't want others to get the idea that they are too interested in spiritual matters.
- ***Yes, and it is pride that explains why some of you are offended right now by the way I've just attributed some of your thoughts and actions to your pride!***

Pride puts a person beyond the perceived need for instruction. "I don't need the wisdom of God's Word. I've already got it. I don't need the instruction and encouragement of others; I'm beyond that sort of thing. I don't need to be held accountable for my actions. Who are they to tell me what to do or not to do?" The proud heart is impervious to rebuke and insensitive to conviction. That's why he's more hopeless than the fool.

So how do we uproot pride from our hearts and overcome its insidious influence in our lives? Consider 1 Corinthians 4:7. There Paul asks this of the arrogant Corinthians:

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

It is very difficult for the person who understands the sovereignty of God’s grace to be prideful, unless of course he takes credit for understanding it! To know that all we have is a gift, that all we experience and enjoy is an expression of God’s goodness and not ours, to know that everything in our possession, even and especially our salvation, is a gift is to take the first step in defeating and dethroning pride from our hearts. ***Pride is taking credit for what God has done. Pride is cosmic theft! God hates pride!***

Is there a reward for meekness? Oh, my, yes! The earth! I’m convinced Jesus had in mind the new earth that we read about in Revelation 21-22. Simply put, whatever loss you may incur in this life because you chose to walk the path of humility and meekness, you will receive many, many times over when you enter the glory and splendor of the new heaven and new earth.

I entitled this message, “What’s So Blessed about Mourning and Meekness?” I hope and pray that you now know the answer!