

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**

**Sermon Series - Focus On The Heart**

**Sermon Title - You Can't Be Serious**

**Sermon Text - Matthew 5:4**

**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

“Lord I will wrestle with Your heart, but I won't let You go! Here in the shadows here I will offer my praise! What's true in the light is still true in the dark, You're good and You're kind And You care for this heart, Lord I believe that You weep with me!” I was talking with a funeral director several years ago as we were walking out to the graveside for an interment. We were talking about the difficult things we have to deal with and the questions that inevitably come from our line of work and I told him this, “That's true, but if I give up my hope and trust that we serve a good God who loves us and cares deeply for us and has a plan to work in our lives even in the worst of times, If I give that up, I've got nothing left! The world can't give me the hope, the peace, the comfort and the strength that I get when I look at the heart of God on the Cross. For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life! I'm never giving that up, ever! I'm going to hold on to that like an old Bulldog!” He agreed! Let's pray and we're going to focus on the heart by studying the concept of mourning! Pray!

Didn't Dr. Ogea do such a wonderful job of explaining the first beatitude last week? Wait, poor Pastor Larry is getting old, and forgetful, that's Andrew's dad, Dr. Ogea, and he preached the week before! Andrew preached last week. You may not know it, because Andrew is humble about it, but yes he has a doctor of ministry degree also and God used his skills of study to explain an oft misunderstood passage to us extremely well last week and it touched a lot of lives. Bankrupt and Happy! When we declare spiritual bankruptcy and begin depending on the righteousness of Jesus Christ for our salvation in eternity and for our power to live Godly lives in this world, it's a game changer, a life changer! Amen? Amen! Now let me ask you a question...

Have you ever had someone say something to you and your immediate response was: seriously? Or: You can't be serious? Or: You've got to be kidding? Or: You don't expect me to believe that, do you? Those questions could have very well been on the minds of the disciples who were gathered around Jesus and certainly the crowds who were listening to Jesus teach His disciples when He said...

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Jesus, You can't be serious! What blessing could ever come from a broken heart? And sometimes the grief is just so gut wrenching that it's hard to imagine ever finding comfort. You know, when you are going through the stages of grief, those early stages can even bring out anger! Like when someone innocently tries to comfort but their words just come out wrong and maybe their words are just wrong and misplaced. But Jesus' words were not misplaced! We must remember here that Jesus is talking to His disciples first and foremost. He tells them that they will be comforted, and He can tell them that because He knows the outcome of their faith!

They will be comforted! Jesus wanted that for the crowds as well, but whether or not they would find the same comfort in their times of mourning would be based on their faith decision.

The philosopher Plato was once asked, "What is man?" To which he said, "Man is a featherless biped," Meaning we are animals with just two feet rather than four. But I would say that man is so much more! For one thing, while some animals, like elephants, exhibit some degree of grief, humans are much more deeply impacted by grief! We don't just instinctively get over it and move on. We have to process grief and mourning is a part of that process.

Of the eight beatitudes, seven have to do with aspects of a person's character, who they are on the inside, in their hearts and how that impacts who they are on the outside with their actions. The eighth beatitude has to do with the persecution that sometimes happens to those who have the characteristics found in the first seven beatitudes. After each of the beatitudes there is a promise given. When Jesus said blessed are those who mourn, what was He talking about? What kind of mourning was He referring to? That's a good question and I believe it can be answered in multiple ways. And when Jesus said they would be comforted, how would that comfort come and what form would it take? Let's see if we can answer these questions...

### **Why do we mourn?**

### **How do we find comfort in mourning?**

We mourn different things. We'll certainly talk today about mourning the loss of a loved one, but there are many things people mourn. Andrew and I were talking this week about how people mourn losses in the stock market! Some of you may be dealing with that today! People mourn getting passed over for a job promotion! People mourn the loss of personal possessions in fires and natural disasters. Now I know that sometimes, from a Christian perspective, we might be tempted to say, "well it's just stuff and stuff can be replaced!" While that's certainly true, I can tell you from personal experience it's not so easy to have that perspective when it's your pile of stuff out by the road waiting to be hauled off to the dump. Stuff you worked for, or things that had sentimental value like family heirlooms. So I'm just saying, right or wrong, those are things we as humans mourn. And in this world people mourn the loss of popularity! So much so that most social platforms, while you can still like or dislike something, only the likes will be recorded and shown! Why? Because people literally mourn the loss of likes on social media because of what it means to their perceived popularity. And people do mourn the loss of friendships and relationships in their personal lives here in the real world. And while a Christian certainly mourns some of the same things, it shouldn't be at the same level, because our hope is found in other places! Amen? Christians do, however, mourn some things that the world doesn't mourn, because we recognize losses, the world is totally blind to see! For example...

### **1. We mourn because of our spiritual poverty!**

We recognize that we are not all God created us to be! We have come to understand what Paul stated in this well known verse...

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Paul explains spiritual poverty so well as he mourns his own sinful nature. Listen as he describes his sinful condition...

Romans 7:18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Romans 7:19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Romans 7:21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

Romans 7:22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law;

Romans 7:23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

### **How do we find comfort when we mourn our fallen spiritual condition?**

Paul tells us in the verses following the question he had posed, "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

Romans 7:25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Romans 8:2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Wow! I don't know about you, but that gives me great comfort to know that Jesus took my sin debt and He paid it in full! I'm spiritually impoverished and do not have the resources to pay my debt, but He graciously paid it and boy the comfort and peace and hope I now have of eternal life in glory and freedom from guilt in this life! I'm forgiven! I'm free! I'm clean! As the old song says...

"He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sins away.

And now I sing a brand new song: Amazing Grace (all day long) Christ Jesus Paid the debt that I could never pay”

Jesus did that so we could be restored to God and have a relationship with Him! But there’s something else we mourn in regards to our spiritual poverty...

## **2. We mourn the loss that sin has brought into our lives!**

Again, people in the world many times simply do not realize the cost of sin in their lives and what they are losing to sin. If a person has never accepted Jesus as their Savior and established a relationship with Him, then sin separates them from God! What a tragic loss! And for a Christian, who has accepted the forgiveness of Jesus, but who is not walking with The Lord, then the sin in their life causes them to lose their fellowship with God! Also tragic. More on this in a minute. But we also mourn the loss that sin causes in terms of broken human relationships and fellowship with our fellow man. And we must remember that sometimes the relationship with our fellowman may be broken by their sin and not our own. But we mourn the loss of the friendship nonetheless!

And then a Christian mourns the fact that sin causes their witness to be damaged, and that can be hard to repair! Not impossible, but very difficult and it takes precious time. And while a follower of Christ is assured of the forgiveness of sin and that Jesus took our punishment on the Cross, we must never forget that some consequences can not be mitigated. When negative consequences due to our sin happen that can’t be turned around in this life, we mourn that! But here’s a wonderful truth: If you ask God for forgiveness He’ll grant that and while consequences may remain, God will be there to help you weather the consequences. He’s just so loving! The Psalmist Asaph gives us some insight into the mourning that a believer sometimes endures in this life...

Psalm 77:1 I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.

Psalm 77:2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted.

Psalm 77:3 I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.

Psalm 77:4 You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

Psalm 77:5 I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;

Psalm 77:6 I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

Psalm 77:7 “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?”

Psalm 77:8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?

Psalm 77:9 Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Psalm 77:10 Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.

Psalm 77:11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

Psalm 77:12 I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

Psalm 77:13 Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?

## **How do we find comfort when we mourn the losses due to sin?**

First we must understand that once we have a relationship with God in salvation, we never lose that. If we did, then we would live in constant fear of wondering if we had crossed the line and lost our salvation. If this were the case then there would be a threshold and at a certain point, or with a certain sin, or with a certain number of sins you would lose the gift of salvation God had given you. At that point you're constantly trying to figure out if your good has outweighed your bad. If this is the case then it's back on you to earn your salvation by keeping the letter of the law, and once you're back in that, you're living under the weight of the law again. My reading and understanding of Scripture just does not support that line of reasoning. Once you are adopted into the family of God that adoption is irrevocable.

However, our fellowship with God is something that must be maintained by a deliberate desire on our part to walk with God and to allow The Holy Spirit of God to guide us, direct us, teach us and convict us when we are not living lives that please God. Living in sinful rebellion keeps us from experiencing the blessed life of freedom from the power of sin that God wants us to enjoy! Paul tells us...

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Romans 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Oswald Chambers says this in his devotion for March 7th - "Paul is speaking of the things that might seem likely to separate or wedge in between the saint and the love of God; but the remarkable thing is that nothing can wedge in between the love of God and the saint. These things can and do come in between the devotional exercises of the soul and God and separate individual life from God; but none of them is able to wedge in between the love of God and the soul of the saint. Relationship-fellowship. The bedrock of our Christian faith is the unmerited, fathomless marvel of the love of God exhibited on the Cross of Calvary, a love we never can and never shall merit...The surf that distresses the ordinary swimmer produces in the surf-rider the super-joy of going clean through it. Apply that to our own circumstances, these very things - tribulation, distress, persecution, produce in us the super-joy; they are not things to fight. We are more than conquerors through Him in all these things, not in spite of them, but in the midst of them. The saint never knows the joy of the Lord in spite of tribulation, but because of it... Undaunted radiance is not built on anything passing, but on the love of God that nothing can alter. The experiences of life, terrible or monotonous, are impotent to touch the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Aren't those powerful insights? So good! The Psalmist David put it this way and talked about finding comfort in the Lord. Listen to this...

Psalm 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.  
Psalm 103:9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
Psalm 103:10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.  
Psalm 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;  
Psalm 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.  
Psalm 103:13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;  
Psalm 103:14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

He knows we are but dust! He knows we have been weakened by sin's power and deceit. But He makes a way for us! Once again I would ask you to let me share with you another insight from Oswald Chambers in his devotion for March 8th and based on Galatians 2:20...

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Here's what Oswald said...

"What Our Lord wants us to present to Him is not goodness, nor honesty, nor endeavor, but real solid sin; that is all He can take from us. And what does He give in exchange for our sin? Real solid righteousness. But we must relinquish all pretense of being anything, all claim of being worthy of God's consideration. Then the Spirit of God will show us what further there is to relinquish. There will have to be the relinquishing of my claim to my right to myself in every phase. Am I willing to relinquish my hold on all I possess, my hold on my affections, and on everything, and to be identified with the death of Jesus Christ? There is always a sharp painful disillusionment to go through before we do relinquish. When a man really sees himself as the Lord sees him, it is not the abominable sins of the flesh that shock him, but the awful nature of the pride of his own heart against Jesus Christ. When he sees himself in the light of the Lord, the shame and the horror and the desperate conviction come home. If you are up against the question of relinquishing, go through the crisis, relinquish all, and God will make you fit for all that He requires of you."

Such powerful words! So we mourn our spiritual poverty and our sinfulness, but we are comforted with the forgiveness, and the mercy of God through Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross! And we are comforted with the power of God in our lives through His Holy Spirit, and because of that power we are as Paul said...

Romans 8:37 ... more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Now this takes us to another major area of our lives in which we experience mourning and need to be comforted.

### **3. We mourn the loss of life in sickness and death!**

We mourn when a person becomes ill and can't do what they once could, and are going through difficult suffering. Especially when there seems to be little or no good news from the doctors. It's tough on the one who is ill and is extremely hard on the ones who love them and have to watch them in their suffering. Sometimes God gives a miraculous healing, but many times He works through the medicines and through the hands of the Doctors and nurses. At other times, when there seems to be no healing progress in this life, God will give the believer a miraculous grace to endure the difficult situation and to be a witness to family and the world of our faith in the midst of struggles and suffering. And I just believe that sometimes God in His mercy and love calls a person home so that He can give them the complete healing that was not going to happen in this old world. Just this week we've had several church families experience the passing of loved ones! In times like these we mourn deeply and have deep questions as I mentioned earlier. I want you to know that God doesn't get mad at us when we ask questions. The Psalmists asked tough questions all the time and God didn't get mad about it and actually wanted those questions included in Holy Scripture so we could see that it's not wrong to ask questions! God knows that grief is hard, it's tough, and can at times seem like the end of the world. While Jesus was fully God, He was also fully man, and as a man Jesus experienced deep human emotions and those emotions gripped His heart. Jesus mourned on numerous occasions and even mourned over the death of His good friend Lazarus even though He knew He was going to raise him from the dead! It could have been that Jesus knew that Lazarus would have to face death again down the road and that made Him sad. But I think it was something else. Do you remember the shortest verse in the Bible? "Jesus Wept!" Let me share with you the context of that verse...

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.  
John 11:18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,  
John 11:19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.  
John 11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.  
John 11:21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.  
John 11:22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."  
John 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Notice, Jesus didn't scold Martha for being upset or questioning the timing of His arrival!

John 11:24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."  
John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;  
John 11:26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"  
John 11:27 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

John 11:28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

John 11:29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

John 11:30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

John 11:31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

John 11:32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Once again Jesus doesn't get angry at Mary who feels Jesus arrived too late! Instead of being angry at her grief we read this...

John 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

John 11:34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

Don't tell me Jesus doesn't understand our feelings, our grief, our heartbreak when a loved one passes away. Even though Jesus knew the miracle He was about to perform, He also realized that Lazarus' family was not unique in facing the pain of death. This broke His heart and I believe made Him even more resolved to go to the Cross and endure the suffering so He could defeat death and the grave and give us hope and the ability to be comforted when we lose someone! The story goes on to say...

John 11:36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

John 11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

John 11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

John 11:39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

John 11:40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

John 11:41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

John 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

John 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

John 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? I believe He did it to show the world that He in fact had power over death and the grave! He had told the disciples this earlier...

John 11:11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

John 11:12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."

John 11:13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

John 11:14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

John 11:15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Jesus was trying to teach His disciples about the hope of resurrection that followers of Christ have. And the whole event was to not only help Martha and Mary, but all who would read the story of Lazarus and see the story of the amazing Power of God to bring hope even in the midst of tragedy! Paul the Apostle would later give the followers of Jesus a beautiful explanation of the hope we have in Jesus as he answers the question...

### **How do we find comfort when we mourn the passing of someone in death?**

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

I want to end by sharing with you some words of wisdom that our Mission Strategist for the Northshore Association, Don Pucik, wrote recently on his blog. It's powerful!

"Suffering grieves the heart. And my natural reaction is to ask God to make it stop. That's my agenda in the midst of trouble. But my Father has an agenda too. Hard times represent a fresh opportunity to trust Him. To do faith. Troubles "prove" or demonstrate the existence and authenticity of my reliance on Him. Difficulties also have a way of "purifying" faith... so that I realize nothing and no one can be trusted, except Him. All my other avenues of hope evaporate in the crucible of deteriorating circumstances. I just want out of trouble. But... He wants me to turn to Him and trust Him with my whole life. He is saying, "Will you trust Me with this?" He has a life-giving and meaningful way for me through every circumstance I encounter... "

Don ended with a couple of verses from 1 Peter. Listen to these verses...

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

1 Peter 1:5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Wait a minute, Pastor Larry, **You Can't Be Serious**, we are supposed to greatly rejoice when we have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials? Are you kidding me? No, remember we grieve, but we don't grieve as those who have no hope and our hope is based on faith in Jesus. In fact Peter goes on to say this about our times of mourning or grief...

1 Peter 1:7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

1 Peter 1:9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Let's pray!