

The Gladness of Sadness

Matthew 5:4

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After a great week of family vacation in Wisconsin, the bottom fell out two weeks ago Friday. Jaime, Lydia, Pip and Ezra had pulled away to begin their long trek back to Virginia. Megan was in the hospital where she ended up having two emergency surgeries and my dad was taken by ambulance to another hospital due to a heart attack.

As I watched some of our family drive away, and was worried about our daughter and my dad, I walked up the long driveway to get reception on my phone and I started balling. I cried so hard my shoulders were heaving.

After being in two different hospitals for a total of six days, Beth, Megan and I made our way home from Green Bay a week ago. Megan is recovering well, and my dad is doing better after having a stent put in. A couple days later, the devastation of Derecho hit, and we lost electricity for two days. Some Quad Citians were without power for even longer...and some are still waiting.

We are so grateful for a neighbor who let us run a cord from his generator so we could keep our fridge on and make coffee, but some of our other neighbors really got clobbered. Here's a picture of what happened to the house right next door.

Here's another picture from the QCA.

Other communities like Cedar Rapids resemble a war zone and many farmers in the area experienced extensive crop and building damage.

Someone captured a weather map and it sure looks like a dragon was behind all this ☺.

This all came on top of growing concerns about COVID and all the controversy associated with it. Political polarization is running amok, racial tension is high, there's major unrest in cities, many are concerned about the loss of our constitutional protections and parents, teachers and students wonder what will happen with schools this fall. On top of all this, the Big 10 announced they won't be playing football this fall.

Doesn't it seem like all of this is just too much? Are you weary and ragged while struggling with isolation and loneliness?

I'm sad how this has impacted our church because only about 30% of our people are gathering for in-person worship. I'm thankful we've extended our services on Cozi TV through the end of December and we're still posting our services online but I long for us to all to gather again in person.

Because of my personal sadness and the mourning taking place in our community and culture, I decided to pivot from what I was planning to preach in Acts 8 on and instead focus on one verse from the Sermon on the Mount. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:4: ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."***

Here's our main idea: *God will bless when we're in a mess; when we cry, He will bring His comfort.*

In the most famous sermon ever preached, Jesus sets forth eight statements which provide the best definition of a disciple ever delineated. Please follow along as I read from Matthew 5:2-12. Our focus will be on verse 4 but I want us to savor this entire section. These opening words from the premier preacher of all time are known as "The Beatitudes."

"And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

Here are some preliminary comments to help us interpret, understand, and apply this sermon from our Savior.

1. The Beatitudes can only be lived out by believers. Jesus is not saying, "Live like this in order to be saved." He's saying, "Live like this because you are saved."

2. The Beatitudes are a package deal, not a list to pick and choose from.

Along with the Fruit of the Spirit, which is to ripen in every believer, a Christian should, and must, display each of these character traits. They are not just for the “spiritual elite,” but for every believer.

Incidentally, many of the Beatitudes are the exact opposite of what we want to do. While easy to appreciate, they are difficult to apply. John Stott writes: “*The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly the least obeyed.*”

3. Behavior must flow out of belief. Correct doctrine must always lead to Christlike duty. We must not only know *what* to believe; we must understand *how* to behave.

4. Jesus wants us to seek the applause of Heaven. Some translations use the word “*happy*” instead of “*blessed*” to describe those who exhibit these distinctives of discipleship. One author goes so far as to call them the “*Be-happy-tudes.*” This doesn’t do justice to the Greek word. While there is a close connection between holiness and happiness, this phrase conveys how God views people who live in a certain way.

Warren Wiersbe points out that “*blessed*” is “*an inner satisfaction and sufficiency that does not depend on outward circumstances for happiness.*” Those who are “*blessed*” have inner lives that are rightly aligned. The root idea is “*approval.*” Note how this term is used at the beginning of each sentence as if to emphasize its exuberant exclamation of joy.

Max Lucado captures this idea in his book called “*The Applause of Heaven.*”

God *applauds* the poor in spirit.

He *cheers* the mourners.

He *favors* the meek.

He *smiles upon* the hungry.

He *honors* the merciful.

He *welcomes* the pure in heart.

He *claps* for the peacemakers.

He *rises to greet* the persecuted.

How much do you crave God clapping for you? Do you want His smile more than your self-centered aspirations? Do you desire His applause more than the approval of your friends? Do you want what He likes or are you just after “likes” on social media? If you want God’s blessing more than anything else, you can have it. But first you must desire to please Him above everything else.

5. God wants to do a new thing in your life. No matter how hard 2020 has been, or what might be coming next, God majors in bringing good out of bad. Isaiah 43:18-19: ***“Remember not the former things; nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing!”***

Setting the Context

Before we unpack this one beatitude, let’s take a brief look at Matthew 5:1 in order to place this preaching in context: ***“Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.”***

“Seeing the crowds...” While Jesus pulls back from the multitudes on occasion, He also loved to minister to the masses. Matthew 9:36: ***“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”***

“...He went up on the mountain...” While Jesus communicated to the crowds, He was not swayed by the accolades they heaped upon Him. His mission involved pouring His life into His disciples and so He went up on a mountain instead of just being with the multitudes.

Tradition says this was a small mountain near Capernaum called the “Horns of Hattin.” This area was a natural amphitheater so people would have been able to hear everything Jesus said.

“...when he sat down.” It was very common for teachers back then to sit when they taught. This is reminiscent of what Jesus did when the crowds pressed in on Him so much, He had to get into a boat in order to speak to them in Luke 5:3: ***“And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.”***

“His disciples came to Him...” The word “*disciple*” literally means a “*student*” or “*learner*.” The basic point was to hang out with the teacher you wanted to be like. Interestingly, they were so drawn to Jesus they left their careers in order to

study under the Savior. For three years they watched, listened, observed, and asked questions.

I'm excited about the work a group of Edgewood members have been doing the last several months under the leadership of Pastor Tim and Pastor Kyle. God has been stirring us as a church to become more intentionally involved in the task of making disciples. Their first task was to settle on a biblical definition which will frame how we implement a disciple-making process. Let me share what this group has come up with.

“A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.” You'll be hearing more about this in the days to come, but I couldn't wait to share this now.

Jesus declares that one of the distinctives of a disciple is found in Matthew 5:4: ***“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*** This startling paradox could be stated this way: *“Happy are the unhappy”* or *“The gladness of sadness”* or *“God applauds you when you're in agony.”*

God will bless when we're in a mess; when we cry, He will bring His comfort.

Of the nine different Greek words which can be translated, *“mourn,”* Jesus used the strongest one available which means, *“to grieve or wail”* as when a loved one dies. Deep sorrow causes the soul to ache and the heart to break. Jesus is talking about those who are gripped by grief.

There are four arenas in which this Beatitude can be lived out.

1. Lament the losses in your life. This first area might be the easiest in the sense that everyone is struggling right now. On top of that, most of us have experienced excruciating pain at some point in our lives, and if we haven't, we know it's coming. 1 Peter 4:12: ***“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”***

Some of you have gone through or are going through some health issues which make you afraid about the future. Perhaps you've experienced a relational rupture with someone and it's eating your heart out. Do you resonate with Psalms 6:6? ***“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.”***

Brothers and sisters, are you aware God collects every tear you shed? Listen to Psalm 56:8 in the New King James Version: ***“You number my wanderings; Put my tears into your bottle; Are they not in your book?”*** Christianity is the only religion which allows you to be real. When you’re hurting, let it out. When you feel like crying, let the tears fall. God understands. He cares. And He will provide you with comfort.

Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses and Isaiah 53:3-4 characterizes Christ as one who ***“was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...”***

If you missed Jason Crosby’s message from two weeks ago called, “When God says ‘No,’ to Your Plan ‘A,” check it out on edgewoodbaptist.net.

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2. Be sorrowful about your sins. While we should lament our various losses, the primary emphasis of this Beatitude is for us to be sorrowful about our sinfulness. We would do well to echo Paul’s agony when he summed up his struggle against sin by crying out in Romans 7:24: ***“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”***

Over 250 years ago, David Brainerd, a missionary to the American Indians, wrote this in his journal: *“In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted, and I bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness.”*

Most of us don’t use language like this to describe the state of our souls. But we must be sorrowful if we want to truly turn from our exceeding sinfulness. We must weep over what we have become, and we will, when we recognize our sin is not just unfortunate, but horrendous before a holy God. James 4:9: ***“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”***

When Peter recognized what he had done by denying Jesus three times, Matthew 26:75 says, ***“he went out and wept bitterly.”*** This is what Paul means when he writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, ***“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”*** As someone has

said, *“Sin will take you farther than you want to go and keep you longer than you want to stay...and its going to cost you more than you want to pay.”*

David committed adultery and murder. It wasn't until he saw his sins as an affront to the Almighty that he was restored. Listen to what he writes in Psalm 51:3-4:
“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...”

When George Whitefield preached for the first time in the open air it was to miners in Bristol, England. On a later occasion, he wrote he could see they were moved by *“the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks...hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep conviction, which happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion.”*

Are you sorry for your sins? Or, do you have deep sorrow about your sinfulness? There's a difference between the two. Until we understand *“our exceeding sinfulness and vileness,”* we won't mourn like we should. If we don't grieve over our guilt, we won't really understand grace and fully appreciate forgiveness.

This week I came across a convicting post called *“A #2020 Confession.”*

*Lord,
Forgive me.
During this time of shutdowns, COVID, and unrest
I have despaired
Feeling overwhelmed and isolated from others
I have failed to trust in your sovereign will and promises
I have feared
You continually say, “Do not be afraid”
But I have feared disease, death, discomfort and change
I have hated
In my pain and discomfort
Those who disagree with me and those in power over me
Instead of trusting that “...nor anything...in all creation can separate me
from your love”
I have spouted off
In person and online
Impatiently voicing my frustration for all to hear
Instead of being “quick to listen and slow to speak” as you have commanded
I have neglected*

*Those around me who need companionship and help
As I wallow in my own self-pity
I have doubted
Your unwavering plan and ability to carry it out
As the world around me becomes seemingly unrecognizable
Instead of remembering your steadfast love and perfect strength
Throughout history-the world's and mine
Forgive me, Lord. I pray.*

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3. Cry over the condition of others. After looking at our losses, and then looking within, Jesus also wants us to look around and cry about the condition of Christians, and the state of those who don't yet know Christ.

- **Christians.** Do you know you and I are responsible to help other believers and to look for ways to keep them encouraged? Hebrews 3:13 challenges us to ***“Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** If we're not encouraging others, we may actually be causing them to become hardened. As a way to please God and encourage each of us, we'll be devoting our entire services on September 5-6 to prayer.
- **Non-Christians.** In Luke 19, Jesus sees the entire city of Jerusalem in a panoramic view. It was stunning in its beauty with shiny white buildings and the gleaming gold of Herod's temple. But Jesus saw something different. Look at verse 41: ***“And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it.”***

The word “wept” means *“to burst into tears, to weep out loud, to sob deeply.”* This was more than just a tear streaming down His cheek. This same word is used in Mark 5:38 to describe how family members were crying over the death of a young daughter when it says they were ***“weeping and wailing loudly.”*** While everyone else was shouting joyfully, Jesus was crying because of the hard hearts of people. Jesus was not weeping because He was going to suffer and die. No, He was wailing loudly for the lost.

John Knox constantly carried the burden of the lost people in Scotland. Night after night, he prayed on the wooden floor of his house. When his wife pleaded with him to get some sleep, he answered, *“How can I sleep*

when my land is not saved?” He also would say repeatedly, “Give me Scotland or I die!”

What about you? Do the things that break the heart of Jesus break your heart? When’s the last time you cried for Christians and wailed for the wayward? I recommend this one-sentence prayer from Bob Pierce: *“God, break my heart with the things that break your heart.”*

Would you join me in praying for repentance and revival among Christians and churches in our country?

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4. Weep over our world. There’s one last arena in which we should grieve. As we look at our culture, our community, and the world at large, we have ample reason to be in agony.

I came across a story this week that made me weep. I’ll spare you the details and share only the headline: *“Satanic Temple is Giving Away a Free Abortion.”*

Edgewood member Angie Rourke posted something on Facebook on Friday, which summarizes what many of us are feeling: *“The devil is causing so much hate, anger, and division that my heart hurts.”*

We should sorrow for our society like the prophet in Jeremiah 9:1: ***“Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”***

A young pastor visited Scotland shortly after Robert Murray McCheyne died at age thirty. Many people had come to Christ because of McCheyne’s ministry, and the visitor wanted to know the secret of his great influence. The caretaker of the church led the preacher into the study and motioned to the chair the evangelist had used, and said, *‘Sit down and put your elbows on the table.’* The visitor did so. *‘Now put your head in your hands.’* He complied. *‘Now let the tears flow; that’s what McCheyne did.’*

It’s time for us to wake up and weep for our world.

Do you want to be blessed? Then get ready to weep. Do you want to experience the comfort that only Christ can give? Then move toward mourning.

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No matter if you're weeping over the state of our world, crying over the condition of others, sorrowing about your own sins, or lamenting a loss, remember this: *Comfort is coming!*

Let's go back to Matthew 5:4: "***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.***" The word "***they***" is emphatic and can be translated, "*they themselves*" and "***will be***" is in the future tense, indicating a certain fulfillment. We can count on comfort coming to us.

The word comfort means, "*to come alongside*" as an "*advocate*" and is used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26 when Jesus says, "***But the Helper, [the "Comforter" in KJV] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.***"

Here are four truths to remember when you're gutted by grief.

1. God draws near to those who cry. Psalm 34:18: "***The Lord is close to the broken hearted and attentive to their cry.***" Even when things seem overwhelming and impossible to you, *comfort is coming.*

2. God uses suffering and sorrow to draw us to Himself. In Psalm 34:4, we read that David's fears caused him to seek the Lord: "***I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.***" Someone put it this way: "*You'll never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.*" *Comfort is coming.*

3. We grow faster in hard times than we do in good times. Romans 5:3-4 reminds us we can find gladness in our sadness: "***but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.***" *Comfort is coming.*

4. Our pain helps us minister to others. When we're at a loss because of our losses, when we cry over the condition of others, when our own sins give us exceeding sorrow, and when we weep over the condition of our world, hold on to 2 Corinthians 1:4: "***Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we***

ourselves are comforted by God.” This is the same word used in Matthew 5:4.
Comfort is coming.

Larry Libby, whose wife of 25 years died recently, explains what he hears in the words of Jesus: *“If you are filled with grief today, don’t give in to black despair. Cling to my promise: It will be better. The worst is here now, having its day. But the better is coming. Comfort is coming. I tell you, it’s almost here.”*

Fellow Christian, no matter what else happens in 2020, comfort is coming! If you aren’t sure whether you’re a Christian or not, put your faith and trust in the One who died as your substitute and offers eternal life to you today.

While there are a number of reasons why so many trees were toppled by the storm this week, three come to mind.

- **Some had very shallow roots.** Do you have a relationship with Christ so your roots can go down deep? Shallow people who have not received spiritual life by being saved will be swept away.
- **Other trees looked good on the outside but were hollow on the inside.** Are you a Christian who has become more hollow than holy?
- **Other trees topple because their roots are not connected to other trees.** This is especially true with redwoods. Their roots don’t go down very deep, but they go wide, becoming interwoven with other trees for strength and stability so they can withstand the storms that come.

I close with three questions for three groups of people.

1. If you are not yet saved, are you ready to repent and receive Jesus Christ so you can put down spiritual roots?
2. If you’re a Christian, and you’ve become hollow, will you surrender to Christ right now and determine to grow in holiness?
3. If you’re a disciple of Christ but you’re disconnected from other believers, will you commit yourself by becoming a member of Edgewood?

Invitation and Closing Prayer