



The Blessed Life

Text: Matthew 5:1-4

Founding Pastor Ken Werlein

1. How does the world typically describe a blessed life? How would you describe a blessed life, especially prior to hearing Ken's message?
2. Read Matthew 5:1-3. This is the opening to Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, which Ken described as the "playbook" for life in the kingdom of God. Jesus begins with 8 qualities of the "kingdom person" which lead to blessing ("happiness"), also called the Beatitudes.
 - a. How are Jesus' first two descriptions of the blessed life counter-intuitive to the way we typically conceptualize the blessed life?
 - b. In your own words, what does it mean to be poor in spirit?
 - c. How does being poor in spirit lead to the kingdom of God/heaven?
 - d. How will being poor in spirit manifest itself in people's lives? What would you see if someone is poor in spirit? What would you not see?
3. Ken summarized the sermon in a sentence: "If you want to get blessed, admit you're a mess."
 - a. What makes it so difficult for us to admit our own brokenness?
 - b. In what ways are you attempting to keep up a façade and trying to convince yourself and others that you have it all together?
 - c. How can you take a step towards greater honesty with yourself, with God, and with others?
4. Read Matthew 5:4.
 - a. What is the connection of this second Beatitude to the first from v. 3?
 - b. What is the source of comfort for the one who mourns over his/her sin? How should this motivate one to be honest about one's sin?

Challenge: We closed the service with an opportunity to sign our own personal "Declaration of Dependence" on God. What is a daily practice you can commit to this week to remind yourself of your dependence on Him?

Prayer: Close your group time by praying through this corporate prayer of Declaration of Dependence:

"Father, we come to you admitting our dependence on you. We own our sinfulness and grieve our brokenness. As we begin 2019, we commit to the path that leads to real and abundant life. We know that we cannot do this on our own. Today, we declare our dependence on you. Amen."

STUDY DEEPER

Rediscovering the Lost Art of Lament

How does God want us to deal with the great difficulties of life?

Does he want us to ignore them, to get over them, to power through them, or to be crushed by them?

No.

He wants us to lament over them. That is the great lesson of a little-read passage in the Old Testament prophet Micah. Following Micah, we will see that God actually invites his people to lament over them. He wants us to honestly assess what we're seeing, and also to pour out our great sorrow to him at what we see.

The Reality of Lament

What is lament? Lament is a passionate expression of grief and sorrow—to mourn, to grieve, to beat one's breast in anguish. A lament is not whining, complaining, griping or grumbling. It is to say, "Woe is me!" (Micah 7:1): What misery is mine. It sums up the feeling of a grieving mother who has lost a child, or of a widow or widower facing their spouse's funeral, or of a conquered nation. "Woe is me!" is only used in the most dire, grim, ruinous circumstances.

The Bible is not ashamed of lament. In the Psalms, 60 of the 150 are categorized as lament psalms—40 percent. There is one book in the Bible that is devoted to laments, and it is aptly named Lamentations. Why does the Bible embrace a lament? Because it is honest about human experience. It doesn't settle for some superficially shallow way of describing what's going on, as if to pretend that suffering is not serious or that it is just an illusion. We, too, must learn to meaningfully and honestly express the anguish of our hearts, if we are to avoid superficiality or pretense.

Lamenting and Hoping

Micah found many reasons to lament as he looked at Jerusalem in his day. First, godliness had disappeared because godly people seemed to have vanished: "The godly has perished from the earth" (v 2). Second, leaders were corrupt: "The prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul" (v 3). Third, society itself seemed to have gone rotten and trust was always misplaced: "Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend...a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (v 5-6).

Perhaps some or all of those are not so far from our experience of life today!

So how are we supposed to respond? What does Micah do? He laments: "Woe is me!" (v 1). And then he hopes as he laments:

"But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (v 7).

This is how God's people respond to the great difficulties of life. We lament, and we hope in our lament.

Melted by His Lament

Of course, Micah was not the last prophet to look at Jerusalem and lament—in Luke 19:41-42 Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and for the same reasons as Micah. And on the cross, we see Jesus' greatest lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:1). He did not cry out for a physical remedy, but for the nearness of God. He cried out for his presence.

But where was God? Where was God's fatherly care? Could he not have rescued his Son, or have come close to him? Yes, of course he could—but Father and Son both knew what needed to be done. Jesus had to go through this guilt-bearing process for people who could not save themselves. For this, the Father and Jesus experienced the reality of the separation that we face eternally. For this, Jesus cried out the most heartrending lament in all of history.

What causes pain over a separation? It is the depth of the relationship that you are being distanced from, and the length of time that you have been together with the other person. The greater the depth of the bond and the longer the time you have spent together, the worse the parting is. Scripture tells us that God the Father and God the Son were together in perfect unity, enjoying each other's company and love, for eternity. Imagine the pain that comes in severing a bond like this!

This place where Jesus experienced forsakenness—this place of ultimate lament—is where we need to come when we are lamenting. When we cry out to God for his help, we can look to the cross and know that God will not turn his back on us. God's rejection is what Jesus has already experienced, in our place. Jesus' prayer for his Father's nearness was rejected so that we can know that our prayers seeking nearness to him will never be rejected.

We need to let this truth of what Jesus has done for us melt our hearts and cause us to wait, to look, to slow down, to process and to lament ourselves. We lament in a confident sadness, knowing that our prayers will be heard because Jesus' prayer of, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" was not heard. Through the cross, we are invited to run to our Father to let out our cries of lament. Because of Jesus, we can know that our lament is heard. We can cry our laments in hope, knowing that we cry to a Father who will never turn his face away. And so, whatever the cause of our lament—and there will be many, and they will cut deep—we always can say to ourselves, to others and to God:

"As for me, I will look to the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
My God will hear me." (Micah 7 v 7; emphasis mine)

<https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/339755-rediscovering-the-lost-art-of-lament.html>