

Releasing Our Grief

From Brokenness to Blessing #2 - Pastor Gary Combs - August 13, 2023 - Matthew 5:4; John 11:17-44

INTRO: (Vid testimony: Donnie Bradley) Good morning church! We are continuing our series entitled, “**From Brokenness to Blessing.**” The series is based on the eight blessings or beatitudes that Jesus declared in His Sermon on the Mount. These eight blessings of Jesus actually turn worldly wisdom upside down! For they declare that the world’s wisdom about finding happiness and blessing is actually the opposite of what is needed.

Last week, we considered the first beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit (the spiritually powerless), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. We saw how the first step on the road From Brokenness to Blessing is admitting we are broken and powerless without God’s help.

That’s what my brother Donnie was talking about in the video we just watched. He admitted his brokenness to God and cried out to Him for rescue. I talked about my brother in last week’s sermon and I wanted you to hear from him. The Lord took him home last September at the age of 52. He had a dream to give back to God by sharing his testimony and I wanted to help make that dream come true. I pray that his story impacts you the way it has me and my family and many others. And I pray that it prepares us to hear the second beatitude from Jesus:

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

To be “blessed” means to be supremely happy, completely content. Blessed to the max (*macro*)! Jesus did not say what the world says, “Blessed are the happy.” No. He said...

Matthew 5:4 (NCV) They are blessed who grieve, for God will comfort them.

Jesus basically says that mourning, that **Releasing Our Grief** puts us in a position to receive God’s comfort and to truly be blessed!

Need: Yet, for many of us, we don’t know how to grieve. We don’t know how to mourn. So, we just bottle it up. We deny it. Or we try to medicate it with booze, or pills, or overeating, or over-working, or materialism or... But the pain remains.

Unresolved grief can cause us to give up on happiness. We say to ourselves: “I gave up on happiness ... the day my husband left me... the week I lost my job... the time my parents split up... the night my mother died... These are hurts that happen to us. So we just settle into a place of unhappiness and ultimately... bitterness.

And what about our self-inflicted hurts? Did you hear Donnie: “I lost my family. I lost my career. And I lost any self-respect I had.” He confessed his hurts, his grief. Grieving means facing up to what we’ve lost and really mourning it. Not medicating it. Not denying it. Not being stuck in it. But grieving it and releasing it to God!

Trans: The blessed life, the supremely happy life, is ours when we are willing to admit that we’re powerless to change, to overcome our hurts, habits, and hangups. And that we need to mourn, grieve, and trust Jesus as the only One truly able to comfort and heal us. In the gospel of John, the story of how Christ raised Lazarus from the dead is the perfect illustration of this.

BODY: In the gospel of John, Jesus called those who were grieving the death of Lazarus to believe in Him as the only One who could truly comfort their grief and turn their mourning into blessing. We can release our grief to Jesus to receive His comfort. How can we release our grief to Jesus to receive His comfort? The text gives **three steps** how we can release our grief to Jesus to receive His comfort.

Read text: John 11:17-44 (ESV) 17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” 28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” 38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

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HOW TO RELEASE OUR GRIEF TO JESUS TO RECEIVE HIS COMFORT:

1. Believe in Jesus as the only source of true comfort.

EXP: (17-27) Practical Martha went out to meet Jesus. She's not weeping. She's doing the right thing and believing the right thing and going out to greet Jesus. But Jesus calls her to move her believing from her head to her heart. He calls her saying, "Believe in Me."

"Believe" (25, 26, 27, 40, 42 - 6x) (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) - to be persuaded of, to trust, to place confidence in

"I am" (25) (Ἐγώ εἰμι, *egō eimi*) - Lit., "I, I am." Emphatic use of *egō*. He claimed to be God, Yahweh.

"Resurrection and the life" (25) - one of the 7 "I AM" statements in John. Jesus is the One who raises the dead to life. He is the source of life and therefore the source of all comfort.

ARG: Jesus is God and God is the source of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV) ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction...

Jesus promises to give us His Spirit to comfort us.

John 14:16-18 (KJV) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth... I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

ILL: Martha handling grief her way. She's the big sister. She organized the funeral and the burial. She's hurting, but she's staying busy. When will she grieve? When will she look to Jesus for comfort?

APP: Where do you look for comfort? Stop looking? Believe in Jesus. He is the source of all comfort. He is resurrection life!

2. Trust in Jesus as the One who truly loves and understands.

EXP: (28-37) Martha had been full of words, but Mary is full of tears. There seems to be some frustration towards Jesus in her behavior. Notice how she "remained seated in the house" (20) when Jesus arrived? She didn't come out until Martha said, "The Teacher is calling for you" (28). Notice her greeting: "Lord, if you had been here" (32). Was she hurt by Jesus' late arrival? Now notice how Jesus responds...

"When Jesus saw" (33) (εἶδω, *eidō*) - to see, to perceive with the eyes, to inspect, examine, to know, to experience. Hagar named God "El Roi," the God who sees me. Jesus saw Mary's grief and tears.

"Deeply moved" (33) (ἐμβριμάομαι, *embrimaomai*) - "to snort with anger like a horse" (Robertson), to groan, to be greatly agitated, displeased. By what? Death. Jesus, who is Life, hates death.

"Jesus wept" (35) (δακρύω, *dakryō*) - to weep, to shed tears. Different word than Mary's and the Jews "weeping" (κλαίω, *klaiō*), which signifies loud wailing. Jesus shed tears.

ARG: Christ's love for us too great to understand, yet Paul prayed that we would experience it.

Ephesians 3:19 (NLT) May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

The prophet Isaiah wrote of the Messiah as One who would understand our griefs and sorrows.

Isaiah 53:3-5 (ESV) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; ... Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

ILL: Mary's grief is from the heart. Yet, she seems to be having a trust issue. "Where were you, Jesus?"

APP: Some of you have trust issues. You don't trust people. And if you'll admit it to yourself, you don't trust God. Look to Jesus. Put your trust in Him for He cares for you. He loves you and understands you.

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3. Cry out to Jesus to turn your mourning into dancing.

EXP: (38-44) Now we come to the one in the tomb, Lazarus. Everyone believes it's too late for him. Yet Jesus calls them to move the stone. Why didn't He move it? I think He needed them to show their faith and move it. Practical Martha was concerned about the "odor" (39). "It's been too long, 4 days, he stinketh." After praying aloud to His Father, Jesus "cried out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" (43). Lazarus couldn't cry out for himself. His sisters didn't cry out. So Jesus cried out!

"Deeply moved again" (38) - Seeing the tomb, Jesus was agitated again. Why? Did it remind Him of the tomb and the stone that lay in His future? Or was Life angry with death and its tombs and gravestones?

"If you believed you would see" (40) - Do you want to experience the "glory of God," the blessing of God? Believe in Jesus. Trust Him. Cry out to Him. Release your grief to Him and let him raise you to life!

ARG: Look how David cried out to God and look what God did! He turned his mourning into dancing!

Psalm 30:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!" ¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,

God promises to comfort and heal those who mourn.

Isaiah 57:18-19 (NLT) I have seen what they do, but I will heal them anyway! I will lead them and comfort those who mourn. Then words of praise will be on their lips. May they have peace, both near and far, for I will heal them all," says the Lord.

God promises to restore that which you thought you'd lost forever.

Joel 2:25 (ESV) I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten

God promises to exchange beauty for ashes, joyous blessing for mourning, praise for despair.

Isaiah 61:3 (NLT) To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair.

ILL: Lazarus had to die to live. We rarely change when we see the light. We change when we feel the heat.

APP: One final thought: Jesus said to the mourners, **"Unbind him, and let him go" (44)**. Lazarus had been raised from death to life, but he still needed help getting those stinky graveclothes off. Christ calls us to bear one another's burdens and to help those being raised from death to life get off those old grave clothes, those old hurts, habits, and hangups! We need a committed fellowship of believers around us that we're being transparent with and letting them help us in Jesus name.

This is where our **Celebrate Recovery** ministry comes in. In our **CR** we lead people through 8 steps to recovery. We remember the 8 steps by the acronym:

R.E.C.O.V.E.R.Y: (8 principles based on the Beatitudes)

Realize I'm not God. I admit I'm powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable.

Earnestly believe that God exists. I believe that I matter to him and that he alone has the power to help me recover.

CONCLUSION: Will you decide today to... (1) Earnestly believe that God exists. Believe in Jesus as the source of your comfort. (2) Trust that you matter to Him, that He loves and understands you? And (3) Recognize that only Jesus has the power to help you recover. Cry out to Jesus to turn your mourning into dancing. Your tears into blessing! Let's pray.