The third kind of mourning is what Jesus means and it involves sorrow over our sins against God. This *spiritual mourning* is a blessing because it produces repentance and leads to life (2 Cor. 7:10). The more you have spiritual mourning in your life, the more blessed you will be.

Spiritual mourning is an art that Christians desperately need to rediscover today. It is key to tackling what we sometimes call “habitual sin,” that is, a sin that a person may fall into repeatedly over a long period of time. God’s purpose for our life is not for us to remain stuck in a cycle of sinning, saying “sorry” to God and repeating the same behavior. Spiritual mourning breaks that cycle by bringing us to a place where we grieve over our sin, see its cost, and make a decisive break from it.

This is of huge importance for the church today because we are surrounded by a form of faith that bears no resemblance to biblical Christianity. Nowadays, a genuine faith that unites a person to Jesus Christ is replaced by an assent to, or an agreement with, certain denominational beliefs. This substitution makes it easy for many to “accept Christ” without ever pursuing the holiness of life to which a Christian is called. Many non-Christians and marginal Christians are skeptical of this anemic faith – and rightly so – because being “in Christ” should mean something: it should change us, transform us. Any form of faith that leaves us essentially unchanged is not worthy to bear the name of Jesus.

A second way this “faith” is unbiblical is that repentance, which in the Bible involves a change of direction, is often reduced to “admitting that I am a sinner,” and asking for forgiveness. This paltry form of repentance admits the wrong, seeks the pardon, but has no intention of changing the behavior. Jesus calls us to a decisive change of behavior and direction in which we quit the bad behaviors and return to God’s ways.

Isaiah described true repentance when he said: “Seek the Lord while [the Lord] may be found; call upon [God] while [God] is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that [the Lord] may have compassion on him, and to our God, for [God] will abundantly pardon” (55:6-7). Seeking the Lord involves leaving or forsaking ways and thoughts that dishonor God. Calling on the Lord involves returning to God and to God’s ways.

The New Testament version of this truth is found in 2 Timothy 2:19, where Paul writes: “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are [the Lord’s],’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’” This is foundational to biblical Christianity: if you are a follower of Jesus, you’ve got to depart from sinning. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. they belong inseparably together. God’s people repent as they believe, and they believe as they repent. Faith is the bond of a living union with Jesus. For this reason, it is also the wellspring of repentance toward God.

Unfortunately, we are surrounded by a misguided form of faith which is reshaped to accommodate our continuing indulgence. The result is a growing number of people who admit they are sinners and “accept Jesus” without ever having experienced the new life he offers. They don’t feel poor in spirit, they don’t know what it is to mourn over their sins, and they don’t submit themselves meekly to God. Without these roots, they do not have a deep hunger and thirst for righteousness; and knowing little about mercy, purity, and peace they live at a distance from the blessing of God. We desperately need to rediscover the joy of biblical repentance and the blessing of spiritual mourning.

Pastor Colin Smith (whose thoughts outline these sermons) says that “spiritual mourning is a heartfelt sorrow over particular sins, arising from humility and infused with hope, that leads you to forsake these sins at the cross” (p. 53). He identifies six elements in this definition, each pointing to an aspect of the character, focus, motive, or outcome of spiritual mourning. Together, they describe the process by which we can break the cycle of sin and grow in our Christian life.

*Spiritual mourning names particular sins*, stating them clearly without excuse and without evasion. Declaring them and admitting that they are an offense before God is the first step toward repentance. As we read God’s Word, we begin to see as God sees and begin to know what grieves and offends God. Once we name the sin as being within us, we are ready to enter into spiritual mourning.

*Spiritual mourning involves heartfelt sorrow* because ithelps us to realize the cost of our sins. There is a cost to ourselves: we are not all that we could be in Christ, because this sin holds us back. There is a cost to others: people are hurt by our sin. Finally, there is the cost to Jesus who suffered and died for the very sin we mourn.

*Spiritual mourning arises from humility*. It recognizes that we cannot we cannot fix this without God’s help. Seeing our sins as costly to Jesus takes us back to the first two rings: naming our sins and feeling sorrow for our actions humbles us and gives us momentum to come before God to confess and to depend on God’s grace and mercy.

*Spiritual mourning is infused with hope.* When we mourn our sins, seeing them for what they are, it can be easy to despair. But when God shines light on our sins, God’s great purpose is to lead us to Jesus, the friend of sinners. In Jesus we always find hope. Hope is a signature mark of spiritual mourning, and it arises from faith in Christ and all that he accomplished through the cross.

*Spiritual mourning happens at the cross*. At the cross of Christ is where we forsake our sins and break the pattern of habitual sins. Naming and confessing our sins leads us into spiritual mourning; but knowing the love of Jesus will take us further; and the love of Jesus is always found at the foot of the cross.

*Spiritual mourning leads us to forsake sin*, which is why we can speak of spiritual mourning as being a blessing. If we do the work of spiritual mourning thoroughly, we will have strength to overcome the sin that defeats us, and to forsake it at the cross. When we take ownership for our sins, we undertake the spiritual mourning that will lead us to God’s blessing in life.

“Spiritual mourning is a heartfelt sorrow over particular sins, arising from humility and infused with hope, that leads you to forsake these sins at the cross.” May God, who is quick to forgive a reformed heart, give us courage and strength to trade our bad habits for new life in Christ!

Prayer: Lord, help me to find safety in You as I embrace my vulnerability, humanity, and limits. Provide grace for me to not pretend or lie or deny the pain of life, thus avoiding both reality and You. May I pay attention this day to the loss and grief around me, and be willing to wait for You in what often appears to be a “confusing in-between.” I place my hope in You, O Lord, and in Your unfailing love. Amen

Source: Colin S. Smith, *Momentum: Pursuing God’s Blessings Through the Beatitudes*. Moody Publishers: Chicago, IL. 2016.

**Take Ownership**

**Sunday, September 24, 2017**

**Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**Matthew 5:4**

If you’re like me, you may wonder how the words “mourning” and “blessed” can possibly belong in the same sentence. Mourning can be a miserable business, so it’s tempting to skip this verse and move on to something that looks more promising. But that would be a mistake. Jesus speaks of a kind of mourning that is blessed, and learning the art of spiritual mourning is crucial to our progress in the Christian life.

There are, in fact, three types of mourning, and it is important to distinguish between them. The first of these is *natural mourning*: the grief that comes through the loss of a loved one. If God has given you the wonderful gift of a person who is dear to you, and that person is taken away, your natural and proper response will be to mourn. And when you mourn, it’s good to remember that Jesus mourned too: he cried at the grave of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35). The presence and comfort of Jesus during times of bereavement is a treasured gift from God, but this is not the mourning Jesus speaks about here.

The second kind of mourning – *sinful mourning* - is very different. This sinful mourning is pining after something that God did not give you and never intended you to have. Think of Ahab, one of Israel’s kings (1 Kings 21). God gave Ahab a palace and a kingdom, even though Ahab was a pretty wretched king, but that wasn’t enough for Ahab. He saw his neighbor’s vineyard and he wanted that, too. He offered to buy the vineyard from his neighbor, Naboth, but the vineyard was a gift from God to Naboth’s family and Naboth would not sell. The king became “vexed and sullen” (1 Kings 21:4); he pouted because he coveted a gift that God gave to someone else and not to him. This pining after something that God never intended him to have consumed the king, and eventually, Ahab murdered Naboth and stole the vineyard. This, also, is not the kind of mourning Jesus speaks of in the beatitude.