Good afternoon, everybody. Beautiful day here in Albuquerque, New Mexico – starting to cool off just a little bit – about a month early, because the festivals are coming early this year. We believe the seasons follow the festival calendar, not the artificial calendar created by the pope.

The title of our presentation today is Learning to Mourn. It’s part of a series on the beatitudes. It’s that part of the series where we consider how to add the attitude of mourning to our Christian experience.

We learned, in our previous series on the beatitudes, Jesus instructed His disciples about seven attitudes that would lead to success with God. The first one, if you’ll remember was poverty of spirit, and then the second, was mourning. The scripture where we can read that verse about that attitude is Matthew 5, verse 4. And it says there:

Mt. 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. So this verse is one of the many scriptural paradoxes – for to be happy, we have to first be sad. The word there for mourn, by the way – according to the Louw & Nida Domain Oriented Lexicon – is “overwrought with emotion, sadness or loss.”

So why is it necessary to mourn? Well, the Christian worldview says that something terrible happened a long time ago in the Garden of Eden – something that affects all of us in a terrible way every day – and it’s a loss that we need to mourn. We were overtaken by the devil. Other words that are used are captured, kidnapped, drawn away from God. And we all have our [part in] perpetuating that separation from God and enabling it. And that separation from God – that we lost a long time ago – is the cause of all the evil and all the suffering in the world. To redeem us from that – to save us from our sins – to restore the relationship – Christ had to die. And He did die so that we could all be free. So His blood is on our heads and we need to mourn for that, as well.

We’re called to rehearse that responsibility every year at Passover, are we not? So mourning is to mourn over our past sins and the suffering that they cause others and
ourselves, including Christ’s death on the cross. We’re never to be far from it. We’re always to keep it in mind.

I’d like you to think about something else though. When we talk about being sorrowful over the sins and sufferings of other people, that, also, is in the Bible, includes doing something about it. Psalm 25:10 says:

**Psa. 25:10** – *My whole being will exclaim, “Who is like You, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them – the poor and needy from those who rob them – take up the case of those who cannot defend or help themselves.”*

So that is a part of that. As we become aware of what’s going on around us in society, we don’t just feel bad about it. We want to do something about it. That’s a part of mourning.

I went to a really interesting meeting yesterday. It was a training for judges, attorneys and mental health professionals about the tough custody cases. I know we’ve all heard the horror stories about what judges have done in awarding kids to the wrong parent. We’ve all heard those stories. But I doubt that many of us have ever considered what judges hear and know about these things. I know that, until yesterday, I never had. But I received an awakening. I sat all day long with over a hundred professional people – most of them lawyers and judges – some mental health people – and the distinct impression I gained from all of them was that they were there to help. Do you know who they were the most concerned about? The children. They were concerned about the kids. And do you know who were the most determined and indignant of that group? The lawyers. They were the most outspoken and the most indignant about the things that were talked about there.

We went over a number of case histories, where children had been mentally abused in the battle for their custody by their parents. I looked around the room and I saw people sighing, shaking their heads and, sometimes, even gasping in distress about the things that they were hearing. They were mourning.

One example that I distinctly remember was: the presenter had made the statement that he was against 50/50 custody and the lawyers were taking him to task about that. They were questioning him. He said that he was against 50/50 custody because years ago he was interviewing a five-year-old, and he asked the child, “Where is your home?” And the child, with watery eyes, said, “My dad has a home and my mom has a home, but I don’t.” So, from then on, he was always against 50/50 custody, because a child needs a home more than parents do. When he said that, there was an audible reaction in the room – to that story – again, mostly from the attorneys.

I think those of us in the mental health thing, we hear that stuff all the time, but the attorneys, perhaps, don’t so much. But they wanted to do something to help children who are used as a weapon by parents against each other in their battle of hatred toward one another. So, it’s really easy for us to put other people down. Most of the things that we know about judges are from television – not real life. And usually, when we hear stories about how people were ripped off by judges, we’re only getting their side of the story –
not the other side, as well. It was kind of an eye-opening experience for me and, frankly, they set a really good example for me, I felt.

Okay, let’s move on to consider how we might grow in this attitude. I mentioned that we are called to recount our responsibility in Christ’s death every year at the Passover. You can read about it in 1 Corinthians 11:26, where Paul tells us that we should examine ourselves to see if we’re worthy of the body and the blood of the Lord. And this is the first point. We can be mindful of the need to mourn. We are commanded to be mindful of this attitude. By the way, did you catch that? Here we are in 1 Corinthians 11, and Paul is telling the New Testament church to observe the Passover annually – not as the Jews keep it, but in a new way, where it’s all about Christ – the same Christ we all claim to worship as He tells us to.

Also, on the Day of Atonement, we’re commanded to fast every year. And that is a remembrance of the restoration of our relationship with God and being redeemed from Satan. So there’s another commandment to be mindful of our need to mourn – you know, fasting and mourning are synonymous with each other – and to accept our own failings and to fall on the mercy of God. So there are two holy days out of seven where mourning is appropriate and a part of things.

How else can we learn to mourn? What can we do to become more like God in that way? Well, fasting and praying is a good thing to do. We just talked about fasting a little bit. We watch the news. I have a hard time watching the news, but, if we do, then that gives us impetus to do what John did, after he wrote the book of Revelation, and pray, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

We can also pray that we can become more aware of our own sins. When I do that, I always ask God to let me do that the easy way, instead of the hard way. Sometimes He listens and sometimes I have to learn it the other way. We can ask God to give us a soft heart rather than a stubborn one, and to see our faults and how we affect others, and to be teachable people. Fasting is a way to sober the mind and become humble. Right?

**Joel 2:12** – “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

“Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Why would we do that? Why does it require fasting and weeping and mourning? Because we have done a lot of bad things that we need to be ashamed of and sorry about.

It crosses my mind, by the way, while we’re talking about praying about this subject, that this is one time where we can ask God for something and we can know that He wants to give it to us. A lot of times we ask for things and we’re not really sure whether they would be good for us or not – we just want them. God gives them to us when they’re good for us and not when they’re not. So we know that He wants us to mourn, so when we ask God for this, we can know for sure that He’s going to answer that prayer. We can only hope that He does it the easy way and not the hard way, however.
Another way that we can learn.... And you’ll notice that a lot of these points are the same that we covered for being poor in spirit, because you learn that, since they are attitudes, there are certain ways that you learn attitudes. So we said fasting and praying, and we said mindfully seeking, and now we’re going to say studying the Bible. There are many places in the Bible that talk about the attitude of mourning over sin. And if we study them, that will help us, because it will help us be more mindful.

You think about all the great prayers prayed by the great men of God. Most of those were very mournful prayers, where they were mourning over the sins that the people of Israel and Judah had committed. I think of Moses’ prayer for Israel and Daniel’s prayer for Judah. I think of Job saying that he abhorred himself. That doesn’t sound like a party attitude, does it? No. It’s an attitude of mourning. I think of the prophets predicting the future and what the people of Israel went through and are going to have to go through to get close to God again. I think about Revelation and the terrible times to come. So there are lots of things that we can study in the Bible to help us learn how to have an attitude of mourning – to put things in their proper perspective. That really is the whole secret to it.

If you really understand what’s going to happen, you really understand what’s going on now and in the past, it’s almost automatic. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Another thing that we can do to learn how to mourn is to become poor in spirit. We said that poverty of spirit is a precursor to mourning, right? So if you’re having problems with mourning, you can automatically just go back to the one before it and check that out. If we find ourselves lacking in that attitude, we can realize we’ve missed something that comes before and immediately look to poverty of spirit. It reminds us of what John said, “Go back and do the first works.” Actually, he was quoting an angel, wasn’t he? So we get in touch with God’s state and our own, and compare the two, and we’re automatically mourning.

Another way to think about this is to think about mistakes that we make – when we’re talking about becoming poor in spirit. I was talking to a colleague of mine about work recently and I asked her how her practice was going. She said, “I’m making my mistakes and learning my lessons.” And I knew and know exactly what that feels like. And I have a suspicion you do, too.

Over my life I can remember a number of times when I examined my own performance as a husband, a father, a minister, a counselor, etc., and I said to myself, “What an idiot! How many times are you going to do that before you figure it out?” Have you ever had that experience? Sometimes, it seems like that’s the main way that we learn – you know, by our mistakes. But if we’re going to grow in knowledge and experience, we have to be willing to make mistakes and to mourn them.

I was interested that the presenter at the conference I went to yesterday was talking about a time when he got a call from somebody in Texas. He lives in Wisconsin. And he wanted him to do a custody evaluation for their divorce case down in Texas. And he worked with this attorney from Texas for three years – doing this – before he read the fine print on the – I think it was – the APA – the American Psychological Association –
requirements that he have a license in Texas in order to do that work. Then he got a letter from the Attorney General of the state of Texas, who had been prompted by the other side’s attorney. I guess they sent him a cease and desist order. So he called the judge in the case and told him that he was going to have to drop out of the case because he’d received a cease and desist order from the Attorney General of the state of Texas. And the judge said, “If you drop out of this case, and you come down here, I’ll have you thrown in jail.” So he was caught between the two. He said, “It was all my fault, because I didn’t read the rules.” He never should have done the work to begin with. The way it turned out was, the court was held twenty minutes from the Arkansas border, so he spent the night in Arkansas. I guess his attorney had him driven to the court to show up just in time to testify. He testified, walked out, got back in the van with tinted windows and drove back over the border before the Attorney General of the state of Texas could catch him. But he said he felt very foolish because, as a nationally-known professional – an expert – that’s what he’d been hired as – he didn’t even know the rules. So, you could tell, by the way he was talking about it, that he felt somewhat uncomfortable about disclosing that. And yet, in the interest of being helpful, he did.

So we all make mistakes. The trick is to learn from them. And as we do, we realize how weak, and how foolish, and how ignorant we are, and we feel bad about it. And, hopefully, we rely on God to make up the difference.

I used to be part of a sedentary, iconoclastic church. We did a lot of judging, a lot of looking down on, and a lot of preaching, but not much helping. In some ways, being a counselor in my community is a way for me to sort of catch up for my failings there – a way for me to help people who need it. That is the fifth way – I haven’t been calling out the numbers on these. But the fourth one was to become poor in spirit. The third one was to study the Bible. And then the fifth one is become involved in the community.

I’m thinking about a young woman I worked with sometime back – abused and neglected as a child over a prolonged period of time in some of the worst ways you can imagine. Because of the total abdication by her parents, she had no family connections – no family support. Except for her two-year-old son, she was alone in the world literally. She’d been traumatized by so many men she didn’t want to have anything to do with them. She suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder – trouble sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks, anger – trouble controlling it – anxiety, depression – to the point she was non-functional sometimes. You think about all those things, and none of the things that happened to her were her fault. None of the things that happened to her were her fault. And here she is, trying to better herself, overcome her past, and take care of her son. In fact, the reason she came to therapy was because she was very impatient with her son – because she had a lot of triggered anger. So, did I mourn for her life? I did. It was so sad. Did I want to help? Yes, I did. I wanted to help her. The mourning promotes the desire to help. They should go hand-in-hand, unless there is some kind of disconnect there.

I think that that is somewhat of the reason that we have people in the legal profession. I know a lot of them are...you know, there are all the lawyer jokes and all, and I know that
a lot of them certainly deserve those jokes, but some of the people I saw seemed to be very sincere in what they were doing.

The last thing that I wanted to mention to you about learning to mourn is to understand the benefits of it. It’s not a fun feeling, so how could there possible be benefits? Well, there are lots of benefits. In God’s plan for us, comfort always follows mourning. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The implication there is, if you don’t mourn, you won’t be comforted. How does that work? Jesus said, “Broad is the way that leads to destruction,” and that going into the Kingdom is like going through the eye of a needle. “Narrow is the road and straight is the gate.” And that narrow way is the way of mourning. Once that happens, then things can open up. It’s sort of a universal principle, isn’t it, if you just think about it. Like my friend, who made mistakes, learned lessons, and then what? Well, after you learn lessons, and make mistakes, then things get better, don’t they? You don’t make so many mistakes anymore and that feels good, doesn’t it? It’s comforting.

Also, if we repent and are sorry, then there isn’t any need for punishment. Mourning is closely associated with repentance. Jeremiah 18:7 says:

Jer. 18:7 – If at anytime I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. So isn’t that a good thing? If we can learn a lesson, before God gets ready to deal out the punishment, and we can feel sorry and repent of it, then we can save ourselves from consequences. Is that a benefit? I think it is, isn’t it?

Think about the new heavens and the new earth. You read the book of Revelation – 20 chapters of veritable trauma. Then the statement that God is going to wipe away all tears – comfort. Isn’t that awesome? I think it is.

My last example here is out of the book of Job. I’m just going to read a couple of sections out of the book of Job to you. The first one is at the very beginning, of course. It says:

Job 1:1 – In the land of Uz – we don’t know where that was – lots of people think they do, but nobody really does – there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. Wow! Lots of kids! And he owned seven thousand sheep.... What would seven thousand sheep be worth today? I don’t know either. ...and three thousand camels, and fine hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants. Now listen to this. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. He was the richest. He was the most powerful. It also mentions that his kids got in the habit of having parties – they were adult children – for each other. And after they would have a party, he would offer a sacrifice for each one of them, in case they might have sinned. So he was a man of uncommon ability and uncommon fastidiousness, whose ability and diligence got in the way of his relationship with God. And God, in order to draw closer to Job, traumatized him with the loss of all his wealth and his children and his health. He took all
those things that were in the way of their relationship away from him – his pride and his strength – completely.

So now let’s go to the end of the book and read the end of the story. Chapter 42, verse 1.

**Job 42:1** – Then Job replied to the LORD, “I know that You can do all things. No plan of Yours can be thwarted.” That’s quite a difference from how he started out. “You ask, ‘Who is this who obscures My counsel without knowledge?’” You know, we were talking about the uninformed opinion during our Bible study today? Job had a lot of very dogmatic opinions. They weren’t based on knowledge. They were just based on dogma. “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand – things too wonderful for me to know.”

The word wonderful there means too amazing for me to know. “You said, ‘Listen now and I will speak. I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’” My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You! I just thought I knew who You were. Now I really get it. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. I regret thinking those things – thinking I was almost as good as You.”

Well, what is that? That is Grade A, top-shelf mourning. That’s what he’s doing. So what happened as a result of that mourning? Well, verse 10:

**V-10** – After Job had prayed for his friends…. I left that part out. Three guys came to visit him, and they gave him a really hard time. So part of the healing is that Job got to pray for his friends. God told them that He would forgive them if Job prayed for them. So he did. ...and the LORD made him prosperous again, and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters, and everyone who had known him before, came and ate with him in his house. And they comforted him and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him. And each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. And the LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And yes, that’s twice as many as each one of those as before. Right? And he also had seven sons and three daughters. Now, they weren’t the same children. The first daughter he named Jemima... Do you know what that word means? It can be translated dove, or it can mean warmly affectionate. So I think this daughter might have been the apple of his eye. Or maybe it’s about his new warm and affectionate relationship with God. I don’t know. ...the second, Kezia, and the third, Kerenhappuch. So he had three daughters. Nowhere in all the land were found women as beautiful as Job’s daughters. And their father did something very unusual. He granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. Now Job had adult children. They died. And then he had ten more kids. So easily, he had to be old enough to be their grandfather. And after that, Job lived a hundred and forty years, and he saw all his second batch of children, and their children, to the fourth generation. And so he died old and full of years.

That’s especially meaningful to me, because my parents were old enough to be my grandparents. And my father told me many times, when I was growing up, that he would be happy if he lived long enough to see me and my brother established in our lives. And
he did get to see us married. And he got to see all but one of his grandchildren born and to know that we were both happy in our lives.

So those who mourn *will* be comforted. That’s God’s scheme of things. That doesn’t always happen if you’re not in the scheme. But for those of us who are willingly a part of the plan, that’s a promise. It’s golden.

Well, that just scratches the surface, actually, of the Godly attitude of mourning and how it may be ours. Next time we’ll take a look at what comes when we mourn, which is the quality of meekness. And we’ll consider how to, also, make that a part of our lives.