

# TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

February 2025

## “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN”

At this moment, as you read these words, there are people throughout the world who are mourning. You may be one of them. Some folks just began mourning; others have been mourning for a long time.

We normally associate mourning with sadness, but Jesus spoke of mourning which brings happiness. What exactly did He say? “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*” (Matthew 5:4). In this verse, the Greek word for “blessed” means happy [Thayer, word no. 3107 via e-Sword].

The idea of “happy mourners” sounds contrary to reality, does it not? Jacob mourned extensively when he thought his beloved son, Joseph, was dead (Genesis 37:34). The Christ’s followers “*mourned and wept*” when He died (Mark 16:10). Those mourners certainly were not feeling joyful. Yet, our Lord said the path to being a happy/blessed person includes mourning.

Not all mourning which people do is pleasing to God. Some seem to mourn because they are forbidden to participate in some sinful activity. Others mourn because they have no spiritual hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We have known cases when non-Christians were devastated and mourned the fact that their family members became devoted servants of the Christ.

The Holy Spirit instructed first-century Christians, “*Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom*” (James 4:9). In that same context, James called on saints to draw near to God (4:8), cleanse their hands (4:8), purify their hearts (4:8), and humble themselves in the sight of the Lord (4:10). What should we conclude about the mourning which God expects from us? It is genuine sorrow for the sinful choices we make and for what sin does to us and others.

When Ezra the priest saw the transgression of the Jews who intermarried with non-Israelites, the Bible says he mourned because of their guilt (Ezra 10:6). Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), knowing the destruction that would come to it due to the Jews’ sinful choice to reject Him. In the examples of Ezra and Jesus, we see that they mourned over the sin of others.

In contrast, when David mourned about sin, his heartache was caused by *his own* sin. When he sinned,

“*David’s heart condemned him*” (2 Samuel 24:10), and he acknowledged his sin to the Lord (Psalm 32:5). The sweet psalmist of Israel often exemplified godly sorrow that produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Our sin crushes God (Ezekiel 6:9). And, when we sin, it often causes harm to others, harm that could be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Slaves of sin are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), separated from Jehovah (Isaiah 59:2). When we recognize the horribleness of every sin and its consequences, it should cause us to humble ourselves before our Creator, mourn, and weep.

Jesus said mourners “*shall be comforted.*” How can we be comforted when deep down inside we feel the gravity of our sin? Our heavenly Father is the “*God of all comfort*” (2 Corinthians 1:3) Who can comfort those who are down and out. At times, He comforts us through His faithful children (2 Corinthians 7:5-7). God’s word comforts us as well, and He wants us to use that word to comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18). God’s comforting promise is that, when we comply with His instructions and walk in the light (1 John 1:7), He is merciful to our unlawful deeds and does not remember them (Hebrews 8:12). It comforts our hearts to know that if we do sin, we have Jesus as our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1).

Besides Jesus’ declaration that “*Blessed are those who mourn,*” He also said, “*Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep*” (Luke 6:25). Why would the Christ be opposed to people laughing? It is not laughing, per se, which He disapproves, but rather a person’s flippant attitude toward sin. Those who laugh about their sinful conduct make a mockery of the righteous God and His righteous standard of truth. The Bible says, “*Fools mock at sin*” (Proverbs 14:9). Those who giggle when they think about their sin need to humble themselves, mourn, and weep.

The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount cause us to do serious self-reflection. According to Jesus, happy people mourn and are poor. Am I poor in spirit, ready to accept all that Jesus says? In response to my sin, do I mourn properly? Think on these things.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## TAKEAWAYS FROM 2 SAMUEL 3-4

As 2 Samuel 3 opens, Israel was in a state of upheaval, as both David and Saul's son, Ishbosheth, claimed the throne. By the end of chapter 4, the stage was set for David to become king over all of Israel. What happened in these two chapters to cause so much change, and what can we learn from this text?

**3:1 – Civil war divides Israel.** Though there are periods of conflict and skirmishes (see 2:12-28), this is more of an ongoing claim to the throne by both David and Ishbosheth. As time goes on, David grows stronger, and Ishbosheth grows weaker. It is hard to imagine David's steady rise and Ishbosheth's steady decline were not God's providence helping David.

**3:2-5 – Several wives/sons of David are listed.** Specifically, these are the sons born to David in Hebron, as verses 2 and 5 iterate.

**3:6-21 – Abner defects and joins David.** Abner, the real strength of Ishbosheth's ever-weakening hold on the throne, is abruptly accused by Ishbosheth of indecency with a concubine of Saul. Was this a well-founded accusation? Perhaps, but the context lends more toward its being a false accusation from a man fearful of how powerful his military commander had become. Whether true or not, Ishbosheth's claim is highly insulting to Abner, who forthwith announces his defection to David. Abner says he will now help David to be king. Fearful of the powerful Abner, Ishbosheth does not even reply. Abner sends messengers to David, advocates for David to the elders of Israel, and eventually comes to David in person. David holds a great feast for Abner, who promises he will continue to promote and help David. David then sends Abner away in peace.

**3:22-30 – Abner is killed.** Joab, the leader of David's troops, finds out David has sent Abner away in peace and is upset, claiming Abner's intentions were to deceive David and spy on him. Unbeknownst to David, Joab goes to meet Abner and, under the guise of speaking to him privately, Joab murders Abner as revenge for Abner's having killed his brother Asahel (see 2 Samuel 2:18-23). David makes it clear that he had nothing to do with Joab's actions and says Abner's blood is on Joab and his family.

**3:31-39 – David mourns for Abner.** David orders all his men—including Joab—to put on mourners' attire for Abner. David himself follows the coffin to the grave, where he sings a funeral dirge to honor Abner and refuses to eat out of respect and mourning for the fallen Abner. The people take notice of all this and understand that Abner was not killed on David's orders. David further announces that God will reward Joab "*according to his wickedness*" (verse 39).

**4:1-12 – Ishbosheth is assassinated.** Two captains of Ishbosheth's troops enter his house in the middle of the day and kill him while he is asleep. The two men then behead Ishbosheth and bring his head to David, seemingly seeking favor and/or a reward from David. However, David is exceedingly displeased with the men's act of murder and immediately orders their execution. Though David neither ordered nor desired Ishbosheth's murder, it nonetheless opens the door for David to take the throne as Israel's king.

What are some takeaways for us from this text?

- **Ishbosheth never had a chance.** We are not told much about this son of Saul. He seems to have been a man often used by others for their purposes. But the bottom line is this: God had said David would be king after Saul; whether it was Ishbosheth, Abner, or anyone else, they should have known that nothing/no one would invalidate God's decree.

- **Desire for revenge is dangerous and will lead to foolish decisions.** Joab became consumed with a desire for revenge against Abner over Abner's killing of his brother Asahel. But Abner's action was a matter of self-defense (and in a battle context). Joab was so obsessed with revenge that he committed murder in a context of peace. This is not the only time Joab will do so (see 2 Samuel 20:4-10). Before his death, David instructed his son, Solomon, to render justice upon Joab for all his treachery (1 Kings 2:5-6). Vengeance is best left to the all-knowing God (Romans 12:19).

- **Wait on the Lord.** In Joab is seen a man set on revenge and eager to accomplish such. In David, however, is seen a man who is content to let God handle such matters. Proverbs 20:22 says, "*Do not say, I will recompense evil; wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*" Inspired of God, David himself wrote, "*Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!*" (Psalms 27:14). God is not on man's timetable; humans must trust in Him and wait on Him, knowing His timing is always right and best.

- **Life is all about choices.** These two chapters of Scripture exist because of Saul's sinful choices, leading to his rejection as king and David's selection as the next king. The contrast between Saul and David is remarkable. Saul sought the approval of the people of Israel and, in so doing, lost the approval of God. David, however, sought the approval of God, and he ended up gaining the approval of the people also. A principal lesson from this whole account is to *seek to please God above all else*. Human approval is a nice bonus, but *God's approval is all that truly matters*.

- Chad Dollahite

## Practical Suggestions for Our Prayer Life

Communication is something that we do every day of our lives. However, it can be difficult when we try to talk to God. There are a few suggestions we can try to help improve our prayer life.

- Change your posture. We typically pray when we are sitting or standing and with our head bowed. Daniel knelt on his knees (Daniel 6:10). Jesus fell on His face (Matthew 26:39). Paul mentions lifting your hands (1 Timothy 2:8). The idea is that we might benefit when we change our routine and do not get stuck in a rut.

- Write down your prayer. This might feel unnatural at first, but it might help you express what you are thinking or feeling. Have you ever tried to write down the sins in your life that you need to confess to God? What a challenge that is!

- Write down your prayer requests. Make a list of the specific people and specific situations for which you are praying. Some people call it keeping a prayer journal. Not only does this help your mind focus, but also it would be helpful to remind you of things for which to thank God. For instance, when someone's health condition improves.

- Pray Scripture. This suggestion requires some thought because not all Scripture is applicable to us today. However, when we focus specifically on the book of Psalms, there are so many that discuss emotions and thoughts that we still struggle with today. Be sure that you have read a passage ahead of time, in other words, don't just open and pick a page and start reading! But if you are reading through the Psalms and find a particular Psalm that shares an emotion you have felt, make a note of it and read that Psalm as you pray to God.

- Pray any time, any place. We often get stuck in routines that can hinder our prayer life. We might feel the only time we can pray is at meal time, when we wake up or as we go to bed. Pray short prayers about specific things as soon as you think about it. This would also help us when we tell someone we will pray for them to follow through with that commitment.

Prayer is simply talking to God. Yet, so often we struggle in our prayer life. Don't give up! Use these suggestions and many more to help strengthen your relationship with the God of heaven who hears our prayers (1 John 5:14,15).

-- Joel Danley

## Why does Jesus not want His disciples to love their families?

The Master taught that in order to be His follower, a person must leave his/her family members. Those are strong words, words that some find puzzling, even shocking and offensive. We would plead with all who seek the truth to give the Christ and the Bible a fair investigation. Let the Bible shed light on the concepts stated above.

Let us begin in Matthew 10, where these words of Jesus are recorded: "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (Matthew 10:37). Jesus does not charge anyone to stop loving his parents or other family members. What He *does* do is call on His disciples to love Him more than anyone or anything. It is a call to give our **supreme devotion** to Him, not earthly relationships.

Moving on to Mark 10, we see that the Christ pronounced blessings for those who, for His sake and the gospel's, leave their houses, siblings, parents, spouse, and children (Mark 10:29,30). It is not a literal desertion of such people and material things, but it is a call for a person *in his mind* to put the Lord first — it is a matter of **priorities** . . . the Lord must come first. When that happens, our love for others does not diminish, but they are not our top-of-the-list love.

Consider these additional words of our Lord: "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26). So, in some way, Jesus wants us to *hate* our own lives. But, we know that He wants us to *love* ourselves (Mark 12:31). Is that not a contradiction? No. We "hate" ourselves in the sense that we love ourselves *less than* we love Jesus. The same is true for our parents and spouse: we "hate" them in that we love them less than we love the Lord, which is the concept we saw already in Matthew 10:37. Study Genesis 29 and you will see that Jacob loved Rachel and hated her sister, Leah. That did not mean that Jacob loathed Leah, but rather he *loved her less* than he loved Rachel (Genesis 29:18,30,31).

The Bible clearly affirms that our Lord wants us to love our families. Do you recall Ephesians 5:25? Husbands, love your wives. And Titus 2:4,5? Wives, love your husbands and children.

Jesus loved His own to the end (John 13:1). While that statement applied to His handpicked apostles, in principle, it would also include the love He had for His family. While loving them, Jesus chose to put His relationship with His spiritual family above His biological and earthly family. We must do the same.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH JEWS ABOUT A TEMPLE (John 2:18-22)

On two separate occasions, our Lord cleansed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, casting out money changers and those who were selling animals there. When He did so early in His public ministry near the time of a Passover feast, He told such people not to make God's house a house of merchandise (John 2:16).

Following that, a conversation ensued between Jesus and the Jews who were present, with John adding further information in John 2:18-22:

So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?'

Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Seeking a sign – Acting and speaking as One who had authority, Jesus had cleansed the temple. Now some of the Jews wanted to know what sign He would do to verify His authority. On multiple instances, Jesus' adversaries asked for a sign from Him. In at least some cases, they were "testing" Him (Matthew 16:1). Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after signs . . ." (Matthew 16:4). Appealing to the Master to do a miracle was not, in and of itself, wrong. An important factor was the motive and attitude of those who asked for a miracle.

Jesus' ministry was in full swing – He was communicating and doing things in the Jewish community, and people were noticing. How would the Christ's hearers and observers respond to Him? That would depend on their heart: those with "a noble and good heart" would be receptive (Luke 8:15).

Jesus would give them a sign – What would it be? He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). At this point, our Lord gave them no explanation. However, in a later instance with sign-seekers, Jesus said He would give them only the sign of the prophet Jonah. What was that? "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

The Jews' misunderstood – When they heard Jesus speak of destroying a temple, they assumed He was talking about the material structure where the Levites served. Under Herod the Great, that temple had been reconstructed over a period of forty-six years.

This response of the Jews to Jesus' statement

reminds us that two parties can be using the same word/terminology, but be speaking of different matters. As listeners (or readers), we must not assume the speaker's intended meaning. In the Bible, for instance, "temple" might refer to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13,14), the church (1 Corinthians 3:16), or our physical body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Bible's explanation – When Jesus spoke that day about Him raising up a destroyed temple after three days, His listeners did not comprehend His meaning. You and I, though, are blessed to have the Bible's clear explanation: "But He was speaking of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). Jesus was foretelling His resurrection from the dead! This is the earliest time in His ministry where we read of His predicting it, but He later made several more predictions of His bodily resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34).

As we read and study the Scriptures, at times we may not immediately grasp the meaning of what we read. In some cases, if we will continue reading the next portion of the Bible text, we will gain insight into the meaning. That is what we have in John 2 with the writer's explanation of Jesus destroying a temple and raising it in three days. We read in John 14:26 that Jesus spoke of "the Helper," whom He identified as "the Holy Spirit." In John 15:26, "the Helper" is mentioned, then He is identified in the same statement as "the Spirit of truth." When you put all of those thoughts together, here is the conclusion: the Helper who would come to the apostles was the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth. Our appeal is to keep on reading, as doing so will increase our understanding.

The disciples later remembered Jesus' statement and believed – When did that occur? It was not until after "He had risen from the dead" (2:22). What was it that they believed? ". . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." After Jesus was resurrected, His disciples did not *become* believers for the first time. Rather, their faith was strengthened and made firm, just as it was when they saw His first earthly miracle (John 2:11). The disciples' response reminds us that at one point in our lives, the meaning of a Bible verse may seem obscure, but as time passes and we continually spend time in God's book, we may be able to figure out its meaning. So, keep studying!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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